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Two Theoretical Perspectives on the Socialization of Music Teachers

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Theoretical starting-points

Since 1988 my colleague Stephan Bladh, from the Malmö Academy of Music, and I, have followed the student teachers that started their music teacher education that autumn (Bladh, 2002; Bouij 1998a). We started our research project with 169 hopeful students. The music teacher education program was then four years long, but some of the students used more time to finish their teacher education. Due to different kinds of hesitation, 48 students had interruption of studies and 21 students dropped out completely. These numbers clearly say something about the music teacher education program, that something more than formal learning is going on inside our university music institutions.

This is one of the reasons why I have chosen ‘socialization’ as a central concept in my understanding of music teacher education. Socialization is a broad concept that includes both formal and informal learning as well as unconscious influence from the collectivity. This article is going to problematize the socialization of music teachers.

There are different ways of looking at socialization, but it was not any problem for me to settle my view. In the interviews with the music teacher students and then the trained music teachers, I met persons that seemed very self-assured with a settled opinion about music teacher education and music teaching. Therefore I chose this definition of socialization:

Socialization is not merely the transfer from one group to another in a static social structure, but *the active creation of a new identity through a personal definition of the situation*. (Reinharz, 1979, p. 374, italics in original) But, as I have indicated, at the same time I have met music teachers that were not so happy with their teacher education, even

if they had had the chance to implement their individual wishes during the time of study. I will come back to that later.

To get a theoretical understanding of these young persons I first turned to the role-identity theory. A role-identity is “the character and the role that an individual devises for himself as an occupant of a particular social position” (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 65). It was quite natural to use such a theory from the beginning, a theory that focuses on the individual and the individual’s perspective on himself and his actions. Later when a need to get an understanding from a higher social level arose, Habermas’ theory of communicative action was introduced. Both these theories have symbolic interactionism as their origin.

Symbolic interactionism is based on the importance that symbols have in human life. We must all learn how to interpret our shared symbols in society; this being is an important part of our human socialization. All human communication is also made through symbols. As social actors we all are constantly involved in negotiating the meaning of reality with one another.

The role-identity theory states that we have a set of role-identities for all social positions we occupy. This means that our set of role-identities reflects our social experiences. These role-identities influence each other as a result of our interaction. Important is how we experience role-support or lack of role-support from people we meet.

That the role-identity theory also underlines the importance of the individual’s planning of the future is important for me, that the individual constantly is revising his agenda parallel to calculating how his image is going to be received by others. Anticipatory socialization in order to develop the skills that a particular coveted role-identity calls for, and how the individual handles that, is crucial. Who we want to be, and who we can be, are questions about negotiating positions, values and so on. In this way identity can be seen as the individual’s idea about his own set of role-identities, dynamically and hierarchically ordered, and also changeable over time. In my research I could distinguish

three components in the role-identities that I confronted: what the individual actually is expected to master (the competence), what socio-culturally is expected of a person in a particular position and what the individual for different reasons considers to be desirable and suitable (Bouij, 1998a, p. 83).

With the theory of communicative action we can change to a social perspective (Habermas, 1984; 1987). Jürgen Habermas has developed a view of society as divided into a “life world” and a system. Historically this division did not exist, but as a more complex society evolved, a system began to grow out of the “life world”. From the beginning the individual lived his life with his family, relatives, friends and other simple relationships. An illustrative example of how the system grew is how barter changed into a money economy and an economic thinking with abstract values connected to symbolic means of payment appeared. In course of time also complex juridical systems evolved, all this in order to make an increasingly complex society possible.

Human understanding of any kind can only come into existence in the “life world” while the system can only generate effectiveness. The modern complex society must have these two rationalities to exist, but as Habermas points out, if the system expands at the expense of the “life world,” the result is disturbance in the process of establishing meaning, and alienation will appear. The “life world” is the resource by which the individuals interpret a situation, remake their agenda etc.

From Habermas’ standpoint communicative action can be understood as a kind of ideal state, because it is oriented toward mutual understanding and is subject-subject-oriented and thus inter-subjective. It is important to observe that Habermas uses the expression speech act to underline that speaking is an active deed with a purpose. Besides communicative action, he also distinguishes between instrumental and strategic action, both oriented toward success (Habermas, 1984, p. 285). That means that communicative action is the basis for building identity, social as well as individual.

By a useful distinction, we can understand the “life world” by distinguishing three structural components: ‘culture’, ‘society’ and ‘person’. What the “life world” creates

and provides the human being with, at the same time makes it possible for her to be socialized into a specific context (culture) and inside this establish her collectivity (society) and her individuality (personality). (Habermas, 1987, p. 138 ff.) These three components cannot be separated in real life, as they constitute an analytic distinction.

According to Habermas, culture can be understood as a stock of shared knowledge making mutual understanding possible. Within the cultural aspect understanding in a wide meaning is created. It is maintained by a cultural reproduction whose function is to pass on traditions and valid knowledge. Collectivity is the aspect of the “life world” where norms and values are transmitted, permitting individuals to co-ordinate their actions. In this societal aspect the ability to perceive and experience solidarity is formed. Socialization appears in the aspect of personality. By developing ego strength, the individual also develops the ability to balance between the collective and the individual identity. In the personality aspect of the “lifeworld” the individual through responsibility for herself and others expresses this ability in actions.

Music teacher education

It is well known that parents have had a great influence on the young people that study at the university music schools. But also often through music education and music teachers they have had the opportunity to build a musical role-identity. Several of the students also want to be musicians, but fail in the entrance audition for the university performer program, and then choose what seems as the second-best alternative.

In Sweden most of these future music teachers have studied at the municipal music schools, done the arts program at the senior high school and done the music program at the folk high school.¹ This means that they through daily interaction have been practicing their musical role-identities with their peers—another way of saying that they have socialized each other, which is important to shape solidarity among them. The culture that they have been involved with values good music and good musicianship. But what they seldom are aware of is that what is good music and good musicianship is a matter of negotiation. In our data we have stories about folk high school pupils that



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demonstratively spend a lot of time in the practice rooms to demonstrate their devotion for music. These negotiations also take the shape of giving or withdrawing role-support. Culturally it is also important for these students to fulfill the demands of the entrance audition for the university music school. Too often the goal is just the university music school, whether it will be the performer program or the teacher program is a later question.

After successful entrance audition, the fresh student teacher has to adapt to the music teacher education. Many discover that they are not quite such eminent musicians as they had thought; they meet other even more eminent musicians than themselves.

They are introduced to subjects connected to teaching. Some students find that very meaningful, others do not, while some do not even seem to have noticed it at all. Other students have difficulties in adapt to the fact that they are not now learning for themselves, but in order to teach others.

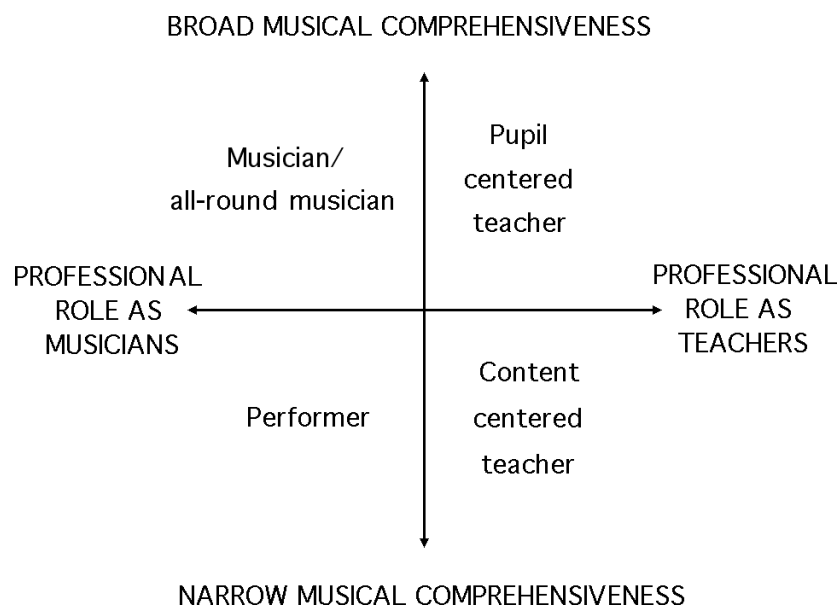
The cultural negotiating is now not only about music and musicians, but also involves teaching. Even students that a couple of years after their degree find themselves working as musicians can evidently remember that the competition inside the university music school was so hard that they thought that they had to abandon the idea of being musicians. Often they said: "I will become *just* a music teacher." This is another way of admitting that to be a recognized musician is the most desirable role-identity in the university music school.

We can also see how the dynamics in the educational culture designs a couple of salient role-identities. Besides this it is also important to be aware that there are several other role-identities that are formed in this culture. But they are seldom salient. Such subordinated role-identities as accompanist, party fixer, computer expert etc. can later prove very important in professional life. That can also apply to role-identities performed outside the university music school. In the interviews there are examples of persons that say that when they became parents, they understood so much more about children that they also began to feel more secure as teachers. Role-identities formed outside the

university music school may in this way prove to carry competencies that can be of use for the student in the future professional life.

On the basis of my analysis I can distinguish four salient superior role-identities that every student has to decide about. Some are regarded as having high status while others are more of retirement positions. I have earlier presented this model (Bouij, 1998b; 2000):

Figure 1: Salient role-identities during music education



This figure illuminates the result of the negotiating over values and meaning that constantly is going on. On a surface level the negotiating is about music and music interpretation, and also about teaching and teaching abilities. But on another level this negotiating is about status and influence. Even though our study is focused on the students, we can also see that the teachers are involved in the process of constructing culture and meaning. For the fresh students, to enter this negotiation is to be included in a strong socialization process.

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The teachers are thus also involved in this battle about forming meaning. Students are always eager to listen to the opinions of instrumental teachers with the reputation of being good performers (cf. Kingsbury, 1988). The individual instrumental lesson is a place where an important socialization takes place. A weighty measure of value of the teachers is the phenomenon of students changing teachers in mid-training. The teacher who gains students also gains reputation and vice versa.

The debate is also over what musical genre is most valuable in comprehensive schools or municipal music schools. Students at home in art music are aware of the tradition their music represents, but they are also aware of its decreasing place in society. Often students at home in jazz and rock music have an exaggerated view of their music as the obvious connecting element with their future pupils. They tend to forget that they will grow older, and the relatively younger pupils will find their even newer music. On the same grounds they can also underrate the need for developing a good teaching ability.

The dimension musical comprehensiveness stands in the minds of the students for the opposition between breadth and depth. But usually they talk about different degrees of breadth in the interviews. This is a question about what musical breadth and depth you require to be able to give all your future pupils what they need to grow in the best way. Usually the students tend to over-emphasize the need for musical specialization.

This culture seems to enjoy a great consensus on the surface. What is most obvious is the struggle about musicianship that is going on. But there are also more concealed processes going on. There is no doubt that the performer is equipped with the highest status within the student culture. Some students, even if they are well aware of this, have however found other ways of defining the situation. More about this later, first some words about handling the performer role-identity.

A good performer possesses what the student culture cherishes as the most valuable gift. If the student strives for the performer role-identity but can't reach this position, he has two ways to withdraw with some dignity. First he can proclaim that he is an all-round musician, a broad musician, that means that he is not so specialized but can play in a

couple of styles or can play more than one instrument quite well. The other way is to declare that you are first and foremost a teacher, but a teacher with a good musical ability, and your musical ability is the essence of your music teacher competence, that is what the content-centered teacher is about. The pupil-centered role-identity is often hard to understand for persons that highly value musicianship, they have difficulty in understanding that anyone has come to this specialized music education in the first place to learn music that suits children and grow an interest in child development. This means that this is a low status position, but those who support this role-identity are often well motivated and conscious in their attitude toward teaching.

Besides this there is a more or less suppressed opinion. Mostly women that for a long time really have wanted to be teachers have found the pupil-centered teacher role-identity to be their natural choice. Some of them can even get in trouble with instrumental teachers about what is valuable knowledge for a future music teacher. One example is a female instrumental teacher with piano as her second instrument; she presents a milder variant of this kind of conflict. Today she very much regrets that her piano teacher made her play a few rather difficult pieces with a thorough interpretation. Now when she teaches piano in the municipal music school, she feels a need to know about a bigger and easier repertoire to suit her pupils, something she says that she understood, but put up with the situation, to please her teacher. Another interesting example is a female class teacher student who used her role-identity as a prominent folk fiddler, a competence she had received outside the academic education system, to get approval in the eyes of the collectivity, i.e. her fellow students, and to grow into the pupil-centered teacher role.

During the interviewing I also realized how difficult several students found it to cope with the tension between the esthetical and the pedagogical aspects of the curriculum. I was really surprised, as other students had tried to convince me that this was a completely artificial and made up conflict. Made up by teacher educators that lacked a proper understanding of how student teachers naturally set about to develop the skill of teach music. On the quiet many students who have problems coping with this tension ask

themselves and their friends questions about the best way of handling their studies. This is also one of the most important causes of dropouts and interruption of studies.

To understand these negotiations you also have to understand that the students as well as the teachers all have made capital investments – economic and symbolic – in form of education, practice, efforts, expensive instruments etc.

The university music school provides a powerful cultural environment, and most students also enjoy it. I remember that I last year in a gathering of student teachers and teachers gave the students some advice that originated from my research. Immediately one student rose and said: “We haven’t come here to get a professional education [which *actually is* what they are here to do]. We are here to develop ourselves!”² That is to say that you develop yourself with music, to prepare for your future, becoming a teacher is something else. This says something about how the collective meaning arises; influential students formulate their view in drastic formulations at different meetings. It is easy to understand that the solidarity that originates in this context has a strong imprint of music performance. It is even easier to understand that this particular culture makes an imprint on young people’s ““life world””.

At the end of the study time something happens. Several of the music teacher students begin to ask themselves much more consciously than before if they have made the right decisions, first and foremost in their own preferences regarding what to practice and prepare. Are they now fitted to meet the labor market? This feeling is often a result of the last field practice period, when they have been out in schools for a couple of weeks. But they have seldom experienced the whole aspect of the teacher’s work. For instance when asked about school conferences, many students can be surprised, why should they take part in that? They don’t think that they have to be prepared for all school bureaucracy that has taken more and more of the Swedish teacher’s time since the 90s. The students have not fully realized that working in schools means much more than teaching what you have learnt in the music teacher education.

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Working life

There are different occupations open for a fresh music teacher. To understand the teacher's wishes it is important to know the limitations the individual has come to know as his own during the time of study. But there are also often problems when it comes to getting the profession the individual has striven for. Several of the new teachers are also prepared to make sacrifices to try out their possibilities as musicians of different types. One example is a male music teacher who worked in a little town 320 kilometers from the big city where he played in rock music groups. Others put different assignments together to get a decent economy and at the same time their foot in a desirable working sphere. In 1998, after six years in professional life, 69 music teachers of 125 employed combined at least two professions, often as teachers and musicians.

A salient feature in our data is all the reactions to disappointments at unexpected difficulties in working life, the 'practice shock'. Working life is much more demanding than many fresh music teachers have expected. All pupils are not interested in music, many teachers have too many pupils to be able to take care of them all, some feel that their position among their teacher colleagues is too weak, they also find that the music teacher profession has a low status in society etc.

The opinion that the music teacher education program did not prepare them for working life is rather common in our data. It is not certain, however that the main cause lies in the music teacher curriculum as such, rather than in the student culture and the collective meanings arising from that. I previously have pointed out that this is a strong source of socialization. It can be hard to transfer a solidarity that during a couple of years of music studies has been directed toward music and musicianship to the pupils. Said in another way, if the fresh teacher comes well prepared, but is too focused on himself, his performance and the musical outcome he can produce through the pupils it can be hard to develop a solidarity that includes all the pupils, even those he sees as unmusical.

Some of these reactions are also due, however, to changes in the school system. In Sweden during the 90s the school system was to a great degree decentralized. The new

national curriculum from 1994 for the compulsory school is by way of example much shorter than the previous ones and can be interpreted in several ways. It does not say what kind of music you should use in your teaching. At the same time the economic situation has become harder in the school management areas, which means that the individual teacher has to formally negotiate with the school administration in a previously unknown way. With Habermas we can talk about this as the system's colonization of the "life world". One music teacher – quoted from a Swedish research colleague's report – expresses his feelings about this situation in this way:

There is no occupational group in this country that one can kick at in the same way as the teachers and say that you should do this, but you will not get any money. Fulfill this in given economic frames. Okay, this will do for a while, but in the end you will shrug your shoulders, and you don't get involved. You get tired of it quite simply. *It is not the kids you get tired of, it is the idiocy from above, I think.*" (Lind, 1998, p. 98, italics in original)

In a way this teacher has adapted to a new school reality. He has used the new possibilities of making a local curriculum that is meaningful for him and his pupils. Similar kinds of change seem to have happened in the whole western world during the same time. Andy Hargreaves talks for instance about changing teachers in a postmodern age (Hargreaves, 1994).

To enter professional life means to change culture in the perspective of Habermas' "life world". There are a number of pupils that the fresh teacher is expected to feel responsibility for. The collectivity now consists of teacher colleagues and pupils, which means that the new teacher must adapt to new meanings arising from a new culture. This means also that a shift in the role-identity structure must occur. In this way a teacher must be prepared for changes. He or she must always be able to give new answers to the questions: "who can I be?" and "who do I want to be?" This is professional socialization as a long life-project.

To sum up: via the role-identity theory we can see strong individuals striving in different contexts for support for their individual role-identities, sometimes with success, sometimes with failure. Via the theory of communicative action we can see how the “life world” around the future music teachers is characterized by a culture of rich musical activity. This is often in sharp contrast with working life, where different occupations can provide “life worlds of very different kinds, often where music has a rather small place.

When I first tried to interpret the music teacher socialization I interacted with strong persons on the way to working life. But when I later on saw the same persons with the eyes of Habermas’ cultural aspect they didn’t appear as strong. Now I saw them as individuals much characterized by a distinctive educational culture. In this way the two theoretical perspectives have helped to broaden my understanding of music teacher socialization.

Notes

¹ 'Folkhögskola', a non-compulsory secondary education institution, that often has some kind of music program.

² Similar situations are expressed in our interviews, but it was in a way both strange and familiar for me to find myself in a situation that I had done research about, and also in front of several colleagues.

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