

Professionalise or perish

A case for heightened educational quality through collegiate cooperation

Olle Zandén

ABSTRACT

Professionalise or perish. A case for heightened educational quality through collegiate cooperation

This article argues for the necessity of developing a professional jargon among music teachers; a collegiate discourse in which musically and artistically relevant aspects of music-making and music education are continuously addressed and cultivated in order to improve the quality of music education on all educational levels. As a point of departure, the author presents findings from his doctoral thesis which suggest that music teachers may be unaccustomed to discussing the sounding aspects of music and that they have low confidence in their didactical efficacy. Drawing from different fields of research, some prerequisites for a reform of music teachers' collegiate discourse are sketched out. However difficult it may be to talk about music in a musically relevant way, it is contended that a living, evolving professional collegiate discourse on musical and music-didactical issues is a prerequisite for general progress within music education, for fair and equal assessment and marking in schools and for the establishment of a strong music teacher profession with the capacity to argue successfully for music as an essential part of public education.

Keywords: collegiate discourse, professionalisation, conceptions of quality, criteria

Over the last decades, public and political interest in educational quality has been on the increase. Countries' ranking in international comparisons such as the PISA-studies have been used as arguments when different actors have been proposing changes in the school systems. In the Anglo-American cultures, a quest for "accountability" has been paralleled with systems for standardisation through explicit criteria and testing procedures. Andy Hargreaves has described this as a process in which "the funeral pyre of public education was starting to smolder" (Hargreaves 2003:13) but has also envisioned a society in which knowledgeable teachers have the professional freedom to generate qualities such as creativity and ingenuity among their pupils and within the profession. There is growing evidence that standardisation and focus on testing and accountability are promoting a deprofessionalisation

of the teacher community (Hargreaves & Fink 2006, Linn 2000, Rose 2009, Shepard 2000, Sheridan & Byrne 2002, Torrance 2007), partly because micro-management from above functions as a token of distrust in the teachers' professionalism (Hargreaves & Goodson 2006). Instead, several researchers advocate the formation of professional communities and teacher networks where norms, methods and aims are verbalised, challenged and shared through collegiate reflective dialogue and collaboration; communities that are bestowed a substantial autonomy and are trusted to define and promote high quality teaching and learning in accordance with their professional responsibility and values (Day & Hadfield 2005, Hargreaves, Halász & Pont 2007, Katz & Earl 2010, Kruse, Seashore Louis, & Bryk 1994, Tschannen-Moran 2009, Wahlstrom & Louis 2008).

It is my firm belief that weak professions are easy prey for accountability advocates and that it takes a profession of stature to defend and develop artistically and subject-specifically relevant qualities when besieged by demands for explicit, unambiguous criteria. In this article, I use some of the findings from my doctoral thesis (Zandén 2010) as a point of departure and suggest a path to music teacher professionalisation by drawing from several theoretical sources. I claim that a professionalisation is imperative if public music education is to subsist in a musically meaningful form. I also maintain that a professional style of thinking and acting among music teachers can only be obtained if it is incepted in the music teacher education and sustained through collegiate collaboration supported by authorities and school leaders.

Conceptions of quality in music teachers' collegiate discourses

The findings from my doctoral thesis (Zandén 2010) suggest that music teachers are not very used to discussing subject-specific aspects of ensemble playing with their colleagues. As a point of departure, I will describe some conceptions of quality that seem to be part of the participating music teachers' collegiate cultures and styles of thinking. I will also interpret some data from the thesis in order to exemplify the complexity of dialogical sense-making. But first I will give a brief introduction to some systemic conditions that are framing Swedish music teachers' work in upper secondary school.

The background to my research

Until 1994, when the Arts Programme was launched in Swedish upper secondary education, there was usually only one music teacher at each upper secondary school. This institutional structure made it very difficult to create a subject-specific professional discourse among music teachers. With the advent of the Arts Programme, the labour market for music

teachers boomed, and within a few years, hundreds of Swedish upper secondary schools had a music department with several music teachers who, according to the governing documents, should keep the pupils continuously informed about their progress and needs, and explicitly explain on what grounds the final markings were made. This put strong demands on the teachers' ability to verbalise the qualities that pertained to the pupils' performances. Evidently, both teachers and pupils were expected to describe and assess music and music making verbally. However, a governmental evaluation, carried out four years after the Arts Programme's inception, detected a "theoretical deficit" (Skolverket 1999:7); the inspectors found little evidence of reflective discussions on cultural, aesthetic and artistic matters and suggested collegiate, subject centred cooperation as a feasible remedy.

Aim, design and analytical technique

The aim of my thesis was to describe and understand ensemble-teachers' collegiate discourses with regard to dialogically expressed conceptions of quality and assessment criteria and to relate these to the governing documents. In February and March 2007, I gathered data from music departments on the Arts Programmes in four towns by video recording the music teachers' collegiate discussions of video-recorded school ensembles that were unknown to them. These school ensembles played and sung reggae, heavy metal, soul-pop and gospel respectively which was supposed to instigate discussions on genre-relevant qualities among the music teachers. Each discussion group consisted of teachers who worked at the same upper secondary school, a strategy that was expected to give hints as to what characterises the participants' "naturally occurring" discourses (Kitzinger 1994). The data were analysed through *topic analysis* (Linell 2001, Marková, Linell, Grossen & Salazar Orvig 2007), which assigns relevance and meaning to a discourse by paying close attention to how utterances are understood and responded to by the participants. By focusing on the dynamics of response and initiative in the discourses, it was possible to describe the situated sense-making from the perspective of the participant teachers. In the following section, the topic analysis will be demonstrated briefly, thus providing a peep-hole both to one of the collegiate discourses and to the analytical process.

This group consisted of three female and five male music teachers. After having heard and seen the heavy metal ensemble, the dialogues started with the teachers' noticing dress code and microphone technique, the musicians' faithfulness to genre and that it sounded good. We enter the dialogue when Darin mentions technical proficiency and Dag explains why the musicians are so skilled by assigning a fictitious history to the heavy metal ensemble:

188 Darin: it's often the case that hard rock musicians and jazz musicians are often (Dag: yeh) the ones with the most drive (Dag: yeh) on their instruments (Doris+Dan: yeh) even when they are big so to speak

- 189 Dag: but what is interesting about this is that there probably hasn't been any teacher (Dan: no...) present (Dan: exactly) when they've rehearsed this but they've done it themselves (Dennis: yeh) and then
- (1) [it sounds better ((Dan starts laughing)) in some way
- 190 Doris: [it sounds better
- (3) it sounds it sounds more-
- 191 Darin: so we can get rid of ourselves you mean
- 192 Dag: [yes exactly
- 193 Doris: [yeh but it sounds more genuine because it's theirs like
- 194 Dag: yeh it's theirs exactly it's their home (1) their street like

According to the dialogical theory of collaborate sense-making used in my study, mutual understanding can only be reached after a tri-partite interaction; the situated meaning of an utterance is most economically constructed through a “minimal communicative interaction” where person A takes an initiative, gets a response from person B and then assigns relevance to this response. Dan's laughter (189) provides an emotional response, which makes it more plausible that his affirmative “exactly” can be understood as a real response, not only an ambiguous back channelling, but it is when Doris (190) and Dag say “it sounds better” in unison that we get more solid evidence that they are working as a talking and thinking collective in the pursuit of establishing interpersonal meaning. This meaning is an extension of an earlier established topic about the constraining effects of didactics on the pupils' autonomy. The topic can be labelled *it sounds better because no teacher has been involved*. Darin's question (191) provides an affordance for a possible communicative project discussing the didactical consequences of the stance taken in turns 189-190. This line of thought is not followed through, however, and Darin's critical question therefore never gets incorporated in the dialogical sense-making. Dag's “yeh exactly” (192) might be a response to Darin's question, but is overtaken by Doris, who continues the “old” project of describing the virtues of the hard rock ensemble. Interestingly, Dag reuses his responsive “yeh exactly” in turn 194, but now it affirms Doris' (193) utterance. Dag's affirmation has such similarity with Doris' preceding utterance that we can conclude that they have reached a consensual opinion. The topic that the group has created in this short episode is that of the heavy metal ensemble sounding better than the other ensembles because no teacher has been involved in their learning process.

Some results from the study

My introductory suggestion to the teacher group had been that they should comment on anything that they paid attention to in the video recordings. Topics were then constituted through processes of collaborative perceptiveness and sense-making and were analysed for conceptions of musical and didactical quality. One of the most remarkable findings in my study was that the sounding music, although it was talked about as an ultimate

goal, was never discussed in detail and that utterances addressing sounding aspects were usually not responded to. In spite of the emphasis on adherence to genre, very little was said about the musical genres as sounding contexts. Instead, other contexts turned out to be relevant to the groups. Notwithstanding that the groups of teachers had no previous knowledge of the pupils, they assigned antecedents to the ensembles and thus created imaginary biographical contexts on the basis of which they judged the ensembles' working processes. The classroom was addressed as a milieu inimical to music making in the pop-rock tradition which ought to be characterised by risk-taking, autonomy, physical expressivity, commitment and freedom of initiative. Teaching for freedom, autonomy and spontaneous expressivity was described as a *contradictio in adiecto*, instrumental skills were expected to be taught elsewhere and genre-belongingness was said to be developed mainly through extensive listening. Thus, the teachers' possibilities to further the pupils' musicianship were described as extremely constrained and the teachers were described as lacking in agency. Instead, agency was bestowed on contexts and contextually described factors such as the classroom setting, the presence of the video camera, the quality, popularity and degree of difficulty of the song and the technical proficiency or voice quality of the pupils. Since the pupils' skills and voice quality were treated as stable rather than developable abilities, not only the teachers, but also the pupils were treated as having a low degree of agency in spite of the strong emphasis that the teachers put on pupils' autonomy and initiative.

Prerequisites for the development of a strong music teacher profession

Neither the topics nor the terminology used in the four teacher groups indicated a specialised professional music teacher culture, despite the fact that all participants, including myself, had music teacher training and worked as professional music teachers. With the possible exception of the voiced distrust in teaching, most conceptions of quality could have been expressed by people without higher education in music or music didactics. Allsup states that "if a profession's collective loss of faith in teachers and their capacity to educate is engendered, we may be sowing the seeds of our own demise" (Allsup 2008:5). Teachers are often regarded as belonging to a weak profession compared to for example physicians (Olsson 2002), and the everyday character of the dialogues in my study supports this view. A thriving, evolving collegiate discourse is arguably a linchpin for professional development, but the results from my study give no hints of such a culture.

A lack of professional language and distrust in professional efficacy constitute a potentially disastrous combination. In the following, I will address this problem by combining Dale's profession model, Fleck's sociology of science, research about

distributed leadership and some principles for communication from Linell's dialogical thinking. Each perspective can give unique contributions in the endeavour to advance and strengthen the music teacher profession. Finally, I will launch the terms *exoteric* and *esoteric* concepts and criteria, which I think can become important means to withstand the trivialisation of teaching and learning that may ensue from demands for explicit standards and criteria. This distinction may be of special value to pedagogical professions that strive to uphold and strengthen the artistic aspects of their subject.

Collegiate cooperation as a key to professionalisation

According to Dale (1999), the members of a profession must strive to enhance their subject-specific and communicative competences on three levels: in relation to clients, to colleagues and to research. The three levels of competence and communication are symbiotically interrelated, thus forming a coherent and evolving professional culture. If we apply Dale's model to music teachers, the first level includes subject-specific knowledge, didactical insights and skills and the competence to communicate with our pupils or students. The second level comprises cooperation between peers in creating and specifying curricula and criteria, a task that presupposes communication and collaboration within the professional community. At the third level, music teachers and researchers in music education engage in critical analysis, research and concept formation through symbiotic dialogue. If music teachers should strive to establish a strong profession, I am convinced that Dale's three-level model can provide a productive frame for this pursuit. Arguably, the second level, collegiate cooperation, offers a key to future integration of the three levels. Firstly, because it is the only level that is constituted by communicating peers with similar experiences and knowledge, and secondly because it can provide an arena on which first hand experiences of teaching practices, pupils' achievements, syllabi as well as research findings can be reflected upon, assessed and developed. Fleck's sociological theory of science contributes with concepts and principles through which the working of a culture of collaborating peers can be understood, analysed and furthered.

Sociological prerequisites for professional sense-making

In 1935, the physician and researcher Ludwik Fleck presented what was probably the first social theory of science (Fleck 1980). Fleck grounded his theory in a case study concerning his own field of expertise, medical microbiology. He emphasised common lay-perceptions, experience from the field of practice as well as the common 'mood' within the profession as critical for scientific progress, change and fact construction. Fleck has coined the words *Denkstil* (thinking style) and *Denkkollektiv* (thinking collective). In Fleck's approach, the term 'thinking' denotes an activity that is distributed, shared and elaborated among participants in what we would today call a socio-cultural practice. A thinking collective of people is, according to Fleck, characterised by a certain mood and

a “readiness for directed attention” (Fleck 1980:188; transl. OZ) from which follows that the *Denkstil* of a thinking collective delimits and guides perception, sense-making and action. Practice and theory are thus indivisible; hearing and seeing will ensue from listening and watching only through the mediating power of conceptions and activities acquired through participation in a *Denkkollektiv*. The maturity of a *Denkstil*, its power to create and support mutual sense-making, is dependent on the amount and quality of interaction within the *Denkkollektiv*. Scientific thinking collectives often have an inner *esoteric* circle of specialists with a fairly homogenous understanding of the profession’s craftsmanship and concepts. Fleck (1983) uses the expression *harmony of illusions* to denote the conservative tendency of thinking collectives to defend their sense-making system. Members of a *Denkkollektiv* tend to disregard aspects that are external to the *Denkstil* or make up ‘facts’ that corroborate it. Thus, the potential for change and new ideas within a thinking collective is largely dependent on its interaction with other thinking collectives (Fleck 1983:178). Such interaction is facilitated if there is a “power-balance” between the esoteric and the lay, *exoteric* world. Science is, for example, dependent on societal funding while society is interested in the fruits of research. This instigates inter-group communication with ensuing new sense-making.

In our lives, we participate in many thinking styles, but there is no style-free thinking or acting. Swedish music teachers may not as yet form a strong professional culture, but the collegiate discourses analysed in my research strongly suggest that there are many similarities in music teachers’ perceptions, sense-making and verbal actions. In my study, for example, the teacher groups fabricated stories about the ensembles that allowed them to judge the pupils’ music making according to its assumed degree of autonomy. In other words, the different groups had a similar “readiness for directed attention”. Considering the temptation to uphold a harmony of illusions, reforming such a spontaneously evolving *Denkstil* into a truly professional culture is therefore as much a matter of deconstruction as one of construction, and thus both a painful and exciting pursuit. An awareness of the functioning of thinking collectives may however facilitate this process, as may a supportive organisational framework.

Collegiate cooperation as part of school leadership

Of course, a school’s personal, structural and social conditions are important for shaping and changing a *Denkkollektiv*. Such factors are examined in research on educational leadership. Leadership can be understood as organisational structure, but it can also be regarded as a distributed, situated, dialogical collaborate practice; a web of relations and practices. Such a view on leadership can engender a common responsibility for change and transformation of a school and for upholding and raising the quality of education (Katz & Earl 2010, Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers 2007, Spillane, Halverson & Diamond 2004). From a distributed leadership perspective, not only a school’s formal structure but also its informal and personal relations, structures and hierarchies can be decisive to the

success or failure of initiatives for change (Hargreaves & Fink 2006, Louis, Marks & Kruse 1996, Penuel, et al. 2010). Many researchers emphasise the fundamental importance of teacher teams for school development. If such teams are to succeed in becoming learning, evolving communities, they are in need of support, authority to put their ideas into practice and a purpose that is focused enough to create a common direction and diffuse enough to allow for creative detours (Scribner et al. 2007). Katz and Earl (2010) summarise the conditions for and workings of such “networked learning communities”:

[...] relationships of trust and mutual challenge are the links; tapping explicit knowledge and exposing tacit knowledge provide the process, and leadership, both formal and distributed, can create the forums and provide the necessary support and capacity-building opportunities to move the processes forward (Katz & Earl 2010:49).

In Sweden, the formal leadership has indeed created various fora; most schools are organised in interdisciplinary teacher teams since there is a long tradition among school politicians and school leaders to advocate interdisciplinary cooperation. However, to my experience, Swedish teacher teams are often structural rather than functional units. They often take the form of staff meetings with unclear goals that seldom, if ever, sound out the teachers’ explicit or tacit knowing, let alone focus on subject-related qualities regarding the pupils’ actual achievements. The lack of organised opportunities for subject-centred teacher cooperation can be seen as “critical elements of leadership practice” (Spillane et al. 2004:39) that suggest to teachers that collegiate cooperation within the disciplines is of negligible importance compared to classroom work, staff meetings or interdisciplinary projects. This seems to be an international phenomenon. The research on distributed leadership, networks and teamwork referred to above, generally focuses on how didactical methods and learning results can be improved by interdisciplinary teacher teamwork, while questions of what should be learnt and more fundamental issues concerning the qualitative aspects of this learning seem to be neglected. However, results and experiences from research on school leadership can be of value for those who seek arguments for the importance of providing space and time for collegiate cooperation within each school subject.

By emphasising subject-centred collegiate work I am not suggesting a “balcanization” (Hargreaves 1994) where music teachers constitute an isolated and stable culture within a school and compile a lexicon of musical terms with fixed meanings or elaborate a system of precise, easily assessable criteria. Each discipline can be regarded as a *Denkkollektiv* constituted by lived conceptions of quality, and questions of quality and of qualitative levels addressing the core of each subject must be raised and debated within the discipline. In order to be professionals, music teachers must undertake a continuous, joint work to verbalise, criticise and reassess the conceptions of quality that pertain to every part of their professional domain. Through this joint work, music teachers’ readiness for directed

attention as well as their didactical repertoire and sense of professional belonging and efficacy will slowly expand and heighten, something which will improve the opportunities for high quality interdisciplinary cooperation. However, such work will only be undertaken if it is perceived as didactically, musically and organisationally relevant, desirable and rewarding. Dialogical theory can provide insights that facilitate this demanding pursuit.

Never take yes for an answer

Dialogical theory of meaning (Linell 2001, 2009, Linell & Gustavsson 1987, Marková, Linell, Grossen & Salazar Orvig 2007, Shotter 2006, 2008) acknowledges the relational nature of sense-making. Dialogue is seen as the generating, sustaining and transforming principle of sense-making, language and culture, including cultural values. Dialogues are situated unique interactions in which the participants relate to each other and to their contexts through bodily expressions and words. Whether the communication is verbal or musical, it always takes place in a situation that is criss-crossed by contexts composed of lived norms and traditions. From this perspective, conceptions of quality regarding music-making and music education are constituted and reconstituted in an ongoing process in which people interact with each other in specific, unique situations as well as with traditions, for example musical pieces, musical genres and institutions.

Situations and contexts are crucial for communication and sense-making; situated meaning is not inherent in words and sentences; instead people use words as affordances in the joint construction of local, situated meaning (Linell 2001, 2009). Each cultural context provides its participants with styles of thinking that guide their sense-making. Therefore, our assessments, appraisals and conceptions of quality are intertwined with the practices in which we partake; socio-cultural practices can actually be seen as constituted by lived values.

The more elaborated a communicative activity, the more shared conceptions of quality among its central participants. If, as I assume, music teachers have little experience in engaging in collegiate conversations on their musical and didactical conceptions of quality, they probably do not constitute an esoteric group and the possibility for misunderstandings as well as the probability for conflicting conceptions of quality is high. If that is the case, it may be of equal value to recognise dissent as to establish consensus. For this purpose, the deliberate use of minimal communicative interactions can be valuable. As exemplified earlier, these A-B-A-interactions give two or more parties in a conversation the possibility to assess the other party's interpretation of what is going on in the dialogue. For such purposes, neither echoing nor short affirmations are sufficient. Consider these alternative dialogues in which a pianist says *bar 5*, although she means *figure 5*:

- Should we take it from bar five
- Okay!

Now both parties think that they have reached an understanding, and they will start from different places. The starting provides the third step in this minimal communicative

interaction and immediately creates a joint understanding that something is wrong. Now for the second alternative:

- Should we take it from bar five
- Bar five

Since the flutist is echoing the pianist's words, there is no hint of a misunderstanding, and thus an echo is of as little value as an affirmation in the quest for mutual understanding.

- Should we take it from bar five
- Yes...from the g sharp

Now the pianist realises that something is wrong, but the flutist probably still believes that they are talking about the same thing. It takes another turn from the pianist to make the flutist aware of them having a problem:

- No, I mean where it changes to D major

In the first two cases, the shortcomings of the verbal communication were compensated by situated action; the situated, sounding dimensions of the dialogue revealed the problem and opened for a solution. In group discussions, however, the possibilities for collective misunderstandings are innumerable, since we usually assume a mutual understanding. Hence, an awareness of dialogical sense-making processes may greatly enhance the efficiency and productivity of group discussions.

In everyday discourse, we are often displaying a somewhat naïve view on language as consisting of clear, self-contained messages; when we have understood an utterance we take it for granted that it was meant to be understood in that way. However, misunderstanding is the norm and complete understanding is the exception (Shotter 2008:1). As long as we are talking in general terms we may seem to be in agreement, but when it comes to action the differences in sense-making usually become apparent, as illustrated by the above examples. One of the contributions that dialogical theory can bring to the creation of a professional *Denkkollektiv* in music education (and to teaching and learning in general) is to draw attention to the complexity of sense-making processes and to our proclivity towards misapprehensions. From a dialogical perspective, it is wise never to assume mutual understanding, since a 'yes' can mean everything from 'I strongly disagree, but carry on for a while' to the 'I fully agree' coming from someone who has totally missed the point. This implicates, that the question 'do you understand?' is as useless in the classroom as it is in a discussion between teachers (as long as it is not answered by a 'No!'). In a cultural practice which involves participants of varying familiarity with the context, it takes much dialogical work to reach a common understanding, an understanding that always can be disproved by further dialogue or action. Being aware of some communicative pitfalls may improve the teachers' ability to communicate with their pupils as well as with their peers, and one of these pitfalls is to take yes for an answer.

Mastering criteria through collegiate cooperation

The word criterion has its roots in the Greek word for judge, and similar to a judge's verdict, criteria may be liberating as well as confining. Since the use of criteria has become mandatory in most public education, one important prerequisite for professional freedom among teachers is the ability to handle criteria in a way that is relevant to each subject's character and conceptions of quality. Both Linell (2005) and Wittgenstein (2007) warn against regarding criteria and rules as fundamental to language use or to other activities. Rules and criteria are rather to be considered as generalising verbal abstractions, as constructs that have been analysed from lived activities and that can be used to talk about and evaluate such activities. Bodily and locally situated communicative action is primary. Verbally expressed intentions, norms and criteria are derivative and secondary, that is, derived from activities and actions (Linell 2001, 2005, 2009, Merleau-Ponty 1997, Ryle 1949, Wittgenstein 1992a, 1992b). By adopting a view of criteria that grounds them in the lived conceptions of quality that constitute activities, subject fields and genres, music teachers have a starting point from which a terminology and a discourse on musically relevant qualities and learning can evolve. In collegiate work with articulating conceptions of quality and creating and appropriating criteria, I suggest, following Sadler (1989) and Sibley (1959), that it is valuable to distinguish between two kinds of criteria dependent on what qualifications are needed to understand them in the intended ways.

According to Sadler and Sibley, criteria and concepts that are applicable to performative activities and aesthetic objects can be divided into two classes. Sadler's 'sharp criteria' and Sibley's 'non-aesthetic concepts' presuppose an overall familiarity with a wider cultural context but do not require a more intimate working knowledge with a specific context or *Denkstil* in order to be understood. They are (at least seemingly) well-defined and relatively easy to apply to an aesthetic object or a performance. No professional musical competency is needed to judge whether criteria regarding physical expressivity, simultaneity or knowledge of a song's lyrics are met. Criteria concerning these qualities are comprehensible for the general public and can therefore be labelled *exoteric* to use Fleck's (1980, 1983) term. For criteria and concepts that assume a thorough knowledge of a specific, specialised context, tradition or *Denkstil*, Sadler suggests the term 'fuzzy criteria' and Sibley writes of 'aesthetic concepts'. I recycle Fleck's term *esoteric*, indicating that they can only be understood after a process of initiation into a *Denkkollektiv* – which for example can be accomplished by attending an Ensemble class in a Swedish secondary school.

As stated earlier, criteria are to be seen as verbally stated norms that have been abstracted from lived traditions. This implicates that people who live in a specific musical tradition normally neither follow nor are aware of the criteria that can be used to indicate qualities and norms within this sounding context. A musician may not need criteria and a novice may not understand them, and thus personal excellence in teaching does not presuppose the use of esoteric criteria. I contend, however, that what should distinguish music teachers from musicians is a professional, didactical thinking style that provides

the profession with musically relevant verbal conceptualisations of quality that can be used to sustain and enhance learning among pupils, students and teachers alike. The elaboration of a professional *Denkstil* that combines the abilities to communicate meaningfully both with music and about music implicates a strenuous collective effort to sharpen the attention and engage in critical reflection through developing a terminology of musical qualities that is somewhat less ambiguous than the everyday musical discourses. In this quest, exoteric and esoteric concepts may be equally relevant for meaningful music making. I do not claim that esoteric concepts address more important aspects of music than exoteric, but I do believe that they may provide important tools for sharpening and directing the attention and for furthering learning both among music teachers and pupils. One of the few words in my study that can be classified as esoteric is ‘timing’ (as opposed to simultaneity, which is more exoteric), but since good timing is dependent on musical style, it would be of didactical value to supplement this word with accessory terms that address parts or aspects of timing.

Schools in the knowledge society have to give the pupils the intellectual tools that language provides in all subjects (Dale 2010:108-118). I have elsewhere suggested ways of creating dialogues on musical qualities in the classroom (Zandén in press). Dialogues between teachers and pupils on qualities in “pupils’ music” can give invaluable input to the professional discourse by showing what aspects of music making that at the time are considered relevant and important by the pupils. Such dialogues may set out from everyday, exoteric criteria, but they can also reveal or create esoteric criteria derived from the conceptions of quality that constitute the pupils’ musical styles of thinking. Whether the impetus comes from the pupils’ musical experiences or from the teachers’, the development of esoteric concepts and criteria can be crucial for the profession’s possibilities to further learning by verbally addressing important qualities in music and education that evade the lay ear. Apart from enabling critical reflection and prolific cooperation among music teachers and pupils, a distinction between criteria that can be understood by pupils and parents in advance (exoteric) and those that can only be properly understood when the learning has taken place (esoteric) can be of didactical and motivational value. The elusiveness of esoteric concepts and criteria may render them a certain mystique, and during and after a course, the gradual appropriation of an esoteric criterion gives the pupils evidence of their own learning. In addition, the mastering of a professional language that is somewhat opaque to the public has probably always engendered a certain respect both for the profession and for the discipline.

Conclusion: reform or redundancy

The modest role assigned to teachers and the appreciation of seemingly independent pupils among my informants may be remnants of both progressive didactical ideologies of the 1970s (Dale 2010) and of thinking styles within the pop-rock tradition. Given that there exists a common Swedish music teacher culture which to a large extent evades the sounding aspects of music, downplays didactics and the teacher's role and upholds conceptions of quality that mostly are of a social rather than a subject-specific, aesthetic character, music teachers may well face redundancy within a not too distant future. An explicit focus on visible, emotional and volitional rather than audible qualities in the teachers' *Denkstil* may in the long run jeopardise music as part of the curriculum. If the case for music education is based on the importance of these qualities only, music can be replaced with other activities, should these give equal or better opportunities for developing the favoured characteristics.

To be sure, values expressed in collegiate discourses instigated by a researcher probably do not equal the values that are played out in the classrooms. The teachers that participated in my study are no doubt conscientious, creative and efficient, but this is not sufficient if music education is to evolve and defend its place within the curriculum. The classroom work must be paralleled with a collegiate joint learning activity, which dissipates and transforms experiences from classrooms and research, and develops a didactically and musically efficient professional jargon that spreads to the classrooms and is used to enhance subject-specific learning. A professional language is most probably of major importance as a means to convince politicians and the public that music and music making harbours unique knowledge and qualities that are essential to life and society.

One of the informants in my study stated that they hardly ever discuss the pupils' actual achievements and this was corroborated by the everyday language that was used in the discourses and the lack of depth in the few comments on the sounding music. The new Swedish national curriculum that will be launched in 2011 stipulates that marks should be given in six qualitatively distinct steps. According to the preliminary new syllabi for upper secondary ensemble tuition (Skolverket 2010), the pupils' sense of musical style, rhythm, harmony, melody and form should be assessed on a scale from 'limited sense', through 'a certain degree of' to 'good' and even 'very good sense of...'. Obviously, such criteria must be substantiated in order to be functional, but to judge from the picture of the music teachers' collegiate discourses that appears in my study, there is as yet very little such subject-specific collegiate discussion. It is my firm belief that the most viable approach to this task is for music teachers to schedule recurrent opportunities for engaging in dialogues that relate criteria to actual playing and singing. It is not until teacher teams get down to brass tacks and jointly assess the pupils' actual achievements that differences in the teachers' conceptions of quality may become visible and submitted to critical, constructive, transformative dialogue. Such discussions will probably influence the formative assessments teachers make

in the classroom and the results of such changes will in turn provide more input to the collegiate discourses. Through these sense-making processes, a change in professional *Denkstil* will slowly occur, new aspects of music making will be attended to, new esoteric criteria will be formulated and tested and traditional exoteric criteria will acquire new, richer meanings.

In times when societies and governments are getting increasingly obsessed with measuring and comparing learning results between countries and schools, a teacher group that lacks a strong subject-oriented collegiate culture will find it hard to defend their subject and argue for goals, criteria and methods that they consider relevant. Public trends towards explicit criteria formulated in everyday language threaten to trivialise education and stifle creativity and meaningful learning. By using and arguing for the relevance of both esoteric and exoteric criteria, the profession may find ways of developing musically and artistically relevant subject-specific knowledge. If this work is performed not only in schools but also within regional and national networks, we may eventually experience heightened quality in music education and more just marking without standardisation.

Researchers can assist in this process by influencing school leaders to assign time for learning studies, action research projects and network building that can give impetus to collegiate quality work, but the success of such projects hinges on whether teachers consider them relevant and practical for teaching and learning. In order for work done outside the classroom to permeate through the music teachers' practice, it must be apprehended as musically and didactically relevant not only among teachers but also by the pupils. The responsibility for this elaborate work must be shared through all levels of the school system, and the creation and working of such teams and networks are therefore the responsibility of the government, research, music teacher training programmes, school providers, principals and music teachers alike.

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Ph.D. Olle Zandén
Stockholm University
Department of Education in Arts
and Professions
Home:
Rådanefors, Herrgården 1
SE-45893 Färgelanda, Sweden
E-mail: olle@zandens.com