Relational perspectives in the practices of choir directors

Pia Bygdéus

ABSTRACT

Mediating tools in the practices of choir directors

Skills are relational, that is, they are developed in a relationship and inte-raction with the environment, and through the mediation that takes place in social processes. From a socio-cultural perspective this paper has its focus on the interaction in choir practice and the importance for the development of the individual, since it is in this interaction that learning, creativity and other cognitive skills are developed. This study of choir conductors applies a combination of methods, creating an opportunity for the participants to verbally express their thoughts, and also made it possible to examine silent dimensions of knowledge. It is practice-based, qualitative and longitudinal in character. Four choir directors were observed closely while working with their children and youth choirs and took part in semi-structured interviews. The empirical data material consists of observation notes, reflective writing, individual interviews, focus conversations, videotapes and stimulated recall interviews. With an overarching approach to learning and creativity as media-ted and relational, the key concepts are tools, mediating tools, socially situated cultural practice and collective memory. In the case of professional choral directors, the relational aspect can be described as the ability to stand beside the recently performed actions, reflect on what has just happened and work on this experience over time. The Performing approaches and mediating tools become available in a social, situated and cultural practice. In conclusion, choral conducting involves a great variety of negotiations and renegotiations of working approaches and mediating tools, and the choir is a mediating tool for the choir director.

Keywords: choral conducting, choir director, mediating tools, relational

Introduction

This paper reports the outcomes of my PhD thesis, a study on choral conducting in the field of higher music education (HME), a study of choir directors work with children and young people. In previous studies (Bygdéus, 2000, 2006, 2012, 2015) I have described the choir director's practice as a complex activity, demonstrating a variety of working tools. When working with a choir, the same individual often has several roles, and in one of the previous interview studies on how choir directors talk about leadership, six aspects of their professional role were identified: the pedagogue, the conductor, and the leader, all combined with administrative, social and artistic functions (Bygdéus, 2006). The results from my research (Bygdéus, 2006, 2011, 2012, 2015) demonstrate that the role of the choir director is complex. The aim of *Mediating tools in the practice of choir directors* (Bygdéus, 2015), is to describe, verbalize and make visible the mediating tools used by choir directors working with children and youth. The study is qualitative and longitudinal in character: four choir directors were observed closely while working with their children and youth choirs. They also took part in semi-structured interviews. The empirical data material consists of observation notes, reflective writing, individual interviews, focus conversations, videotapes and stimulated recall interviews. With an overarching approach to learning and creativity as mediated and relational, the key concepts are tools, mediating tools, socially situated cultural practice and collective memory. Two questions have guided the data collection and analysis since 2009: *what does choir director do?* and *how does s/he do it?* When working with a choir, choir directors often use several aspects of their professional role. Analysed from a sociocultural perspective, the result points towards eight categories of working approaches (Bygdéus, 2015): (a) A listening attitude towards the choir, with the music in focus; (b) a variation in ways of working with the choir; (c) the use of musical routines; (d) the choir director acting as a role model in shaping musical expression with the group; (e) a concentrated cooperation with the choir through short and expressive commands and instructions; (f) reflection in practice by planning and self-evaluation; (g) storytelling, which results in memory training, stimulation of the imagination and the sharing of common experience, and (h) the use of target images expressed as visions, goals or jointly stated, communicated targets. These categories are generated through the analysis of the choir directors' actions and activities in their work with the choirs. This is situated in choir singing as a social and cultural practice. The participants display great individual variation in their choices of strategies for communication and in their decision-making when working with children's and youth choirs. A large variety of cultural and mediating tools are used. In order for the cultural tools to work in practice, the choir director

must have relational abilities. Relational ability is reflected in psychological aspects of using the tools; what and how choral conducting takes place, what is mediated and how. Role models at different levels and in all ages, assimilation, and the ability to shift perspectives, are aspects of the work as a choir director, necessary for the instrument – the choir – to develop and deepen in a context, as well as for the choirs to grow and recruit new members. These results, the eight approaches, are based on three research questions: which working approaches are used by the choral directors?; which cultural tools are used by the choral directors?; and how are these tools applied in the practice of choral leadership?

Literature overview – research vs handbooks

Given that research on choral conducting with children and young people is not a specific field of research, the overview in this paper includes literature of various kinds, connected to aspects of musical leadership. The literature overview (cf. Geisler, 2010) demonstrates that choral research is spread across many disciplines and applies a variety of methods. Research is also conducted in areas other than the musical fields, e.g. in studies of choir and choir singing from psychological perspectives or as a historical, social phenomenon. Considering the focus of this study, however, the emphasis is on choir singing and choral leadership as a contemporary musical practice, histories and practices (Geisler & Johansson, 2010, 2011, 2014; Geisler, 2012).

Research on choral leadership often focuses on choir directors as transmitters and receivers, and describes how choir directors communicate and express musical actions in relation to the choristers. Multidimensional approaches, diverse strategies, different repertoires of actions and different elements interact. The balance between these elements is described as crucial for the choir's existence, as well as for the choral leadership (Kerley, 1995; Sandberg Jurström, 2009; Balsnes, 2009; Ludwa, 2012; Jansson, 2013; Erkkilä, 2013). Handbooks on choral conducting are usually written by practitioners and describe ways of working with the choir and aspects of choral conducting; approaches, tools, resources, technologies and methods. Generic terms such as leader, pedagogue and conductor for choirs are used in the literature and can be associated with the various aspects of leadership in choir (Ericsson, Olin & Spångberg, 1974; Bjerge & Sköld, 1993; Caplin, 2000, 2017; Dahl, 2003). The voice as an instrument is also central in handbooks for choral directors. A variety of means for developing singers' vocal treatment are described, and these can all be seen as

choral directors' tools in their work with the choral music (Carlén, Haking-Raaby Kristersson & Larsson-Myrsten, 1999). The singing situation contains a complexity in terms of how singers hear themselves in the collective choral sound and how the choral director works with the acoustic aspects (Daugherty, 2003; Ternström & Karna, 2002). Sandberg Jurström (2009) presents six different conductors' repertoires of action: the pantomimic, the performative, the typical, the associative, the conceptual and the evaluative repertoires of action, which can be connected to the themes found in the handbooks presented above. Sandberg Jurström's repertoires of action relate to common themes that I have found: a) knowledge of gestures, wordless bodily expressions (Dahl, 2003; Fagius, 2007), b) knowledge of modeling by/through piano, voice and speech (Caplin, 2000, 2017; Elliott, 2009), c) knowledge of one's own voice (Bjerge & Sköld, 1993; Carlen et al., 1999; Elliott, 2009), d) knowledge of how to use associations/metaphors with/of concepts outside the music, for example, to achieve a certain feeling or sound (Caplin, 2000, 2017; Bengtsson, 1982), e) knowledge of how to explain musical concepts with a fact-oriented focus (Alldahl, 1990; Elliot, 2009), f) knowledge of how to use values, confirmation and correction of choral singers' voices (Bengtsson, 1982; Bjerge & Sköld, 1993; Fagius, 2007).

Children's musical learning can be expected to take place in different cultural environments, such as kindergarten, preschool, church, various leisure situations and formal school contexts. Especially the church is an important agent, since 1/6 of Swedish choral singing takes place in church contexts, and church musicians constitute a large part of Swedish choir leaders. Children's choirs make up around 1/3 of the Swedish church's choral activities (Borgehammar, 2013). Several studies investigate how boys and men construct their masculinity through participation in choir singing and demonstrate how this leads to social as well as health-connected advantages (Ashley, 2002; Kennedy, 2002; Freer, 2006; Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006; Faulkner, 2013). This is of relevance for the present paper since it underlines the importance of choir singing in the identity construction process, both in and out of school. Today's children's choir leaders need to be able to work with people at different ages, with different voice qualities, and from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Growing up in a choir, growing up with choral singing and growing into the profession as a choir leader through participation in the choir are all aspects where identity and belonging are important. Working with children's and young people's experiences, memories and identity formation in choirs through musical learning represents a certain challenge (McPherson, Davidson & Faulkner, 2012; Welch et al., 2010; Freer, 2009).

In Sweden, approximately 5 % of the population sing in a choir or a singing group (Statistics Sweden, 2009) which is a similar percentage as in neighboring Norway (Balsnes, 2009). This means that in Sweden about 500 000 people, plus a number of choral conductors, regularly meet in choir related practices. In this cultural context there are different ways to become a choir director in Sweden today. Choir and choral conducting appear in many different contexts, for example in schools on all levels, in colleges, universities and various religious and secular communities. To this can be added health and quality through choral singing, workplace choirs and free choirs. In several professions, such as music teacher, organist and choir director, choral conducting forms an important part. These professions are connected to different formal learning paths, that is, the training and educational programs differ. In addition to formal training there are also informal ways to become a choir director; choristers who shift their position into standing in front of the choir as leaders, or music teachers and singers who gradually broaden their musical activity. As a researcher, musician and music teacher myself, I find that education in music takes place in an exciting field where different disciplines overlap and interact. There are connections between the three domains of music (in artistic practice), music education and musicology, which open up opportunities to transcend borders and investigate issues with different focuses and different methodological choices. In 1988, music education was established as a research discipline in Sweden and demonstrated already from the beginning an interest in the interaction between pedagogy and artistry (Sundin, 1994). The content and direction of music education as a research field has continuously been discussed (Folkestad, 1997, 2007; Jørgensen, 1995, 2009; Nielsen, 2002; Olsson, 2001) and musical learning processes are studied and explored in different contexts where the core interest is the meeting between people, with and in the music and music-making (Folkestad, 2006, 2007). Choral leadership as a musical practice is an activity where the links between music-making and musical learning can be studied on individual as well as collective level. Through stories from the inside and the analysis of these, the purpose is to investigate choral leadership by describing and analysing the choir conductors' actions as well as the approaches, resources, techniques and methods that they use. Consequently, the focus is on studying the use and understanding of cultural tools. Cultural tools as a concept is a theoretical approach to analyze and understand relational perspective.

Theoretical approaches

The theoretical approaches that I have employed to interpret and understand relational perspectives in the practices of choir directors, *what does s/he do* and *how does s/he do it*, draws inspiration mainly from Vygotsky (1934/1999, 1995/2010). Other important theoreticians are Wertsch (1985, 1998), Säljö (2000, 2005), Daniels (2001), Mead (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1986, 2003) and von Wright (2000). I also relate to Alex Kozulin's preface to his translation of Vygotsky (1986) and his interpretation of the key concepts of Vygotsky's theory. With a holistic approach to learning and creativity as mediated and relational (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels, Cole & Wertsch, 2007), the key concepts are tools, mediating tools, socially situated cultural practice and collective memory. Unlike animals, human beings create tools and symbols for constructing and interpreting reality (Vygotsky, 1934/1999). Tools, signs and symbols can also be psychological (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels et al., 2007). According to Vygotsky (1934/1999, 1995/2010) human consciousness is shaped in a dialogue with other people, in contexts where tools, signs, symbols and artefacts are used. Human cognition and perception lead to the creation and utilisation of tools.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the interaction with other people is important for the development of the individual, since it is in this interaction that learning, creativity and other cognitive skills are developed. Consequently, skills are *relational*, that is, they are developed in a relationship and interaction with the environment, and through the *mediation*, i.e. the intermediation that takes place in social processes. In the case of professional choral directors, the relational aspect can be described as their ability to stand beside their own recently performed actions, reflect on what has just happened and work on this experience over time. According to Mead (Daniels et al., 2007: 89), experience can be seen as experimental and not merely as a sum of past events. Thus, there is no obvious sharp distinction between phenomena and experience. For Mead, the process of experience is fundamental, and relationship is where meaning is created. Creating meaning is then a result of the choral directors' reactions to gestures, actions and objects in the social and musical interaction. Kozulin argues that higher mental functions manifest themselves as a result of a mediating activity (Vygotsky, 1986). Interpersonal communication and psychological tools act as mediators in this process. The visible action and activity contains something more than the mere use of a physical tool. A tool is then the visible expression of an idea in the musical practice. In an activity, tools may be converted into verbal communications and actions:

> Moreover, there is, as I see it, a connection between Gibson's affordances and mediation described by Vygotsky: that which is culturally and historically mediated by the tools in a situated activity also becomes possible affordances offered to the creator (agent) as means of his/her agency. (Folkestad, 2012: 196)

The functions of artefacts are determined in specific practices (Säljö, 2005). Researchers following Vygotsky have developed thoughts about the use and situatedness of physical tools (Wartofsky, 1979). The use of the term *artefact* goes back to Wartofsky, who describes three types of artefacts: primary, secondary and tertiary. Wartofsky's use of the term artefact makes it possible to specifically demonstrate the utility of various kinds of tools and mediation practises (Cole & Derry, 2005; Säljö, 2005; Jakobsson, 2012). Hedegaard (2007) interprets Wartofsky:

> Wartofsky argues that all human functions are related to the historical changes in the form and modes of human practice. […] In Wartofsky's theory, perception is related between the person and the world, mediated by culturally produced artifacts that are created historically through human practice. (p. 258)

In a practical context, it is often not possible to clearly distinguish between physical and psychological artefacts. Rather, they are connected with each other, as, for example, the artefacts in choral conducting in a socially situated, cultural practice.

Method pluralism as design

Through the selection of data collection methods, such as observations, interviews and video recordings, as well as portfolio writing, reflection, communication and dialogue, makes it possible to access different types of data (Bresler & Stake, 1992), in this case in the practice of the choral conductors. The studies of choir conductors (Bygdéus, 2011, 2012, 2015) applies a combination of methods, methods of pluralism as design, creating an opportunity for the participants to verbally express their thoughts, and also made it possible to examine silent dimensions of knowledge (Rolf, 1991). By combining a method pluralism where I refused to bother the conductors and myself writing through the process of different data collection, as a researcher, I gain access to an additional dimension of collective memory that is possible to visualize through

observations, writing and follow-up interviews. From a phenomenographic approach (Marton & Booth, 2000) and emphasizing a hermeneutical approach (Ödman, 2007), two questions have guided the data collection and analysis: *what does s/he do?* and *how does s/he do it?* (Bygdéus, 2011, 2012, 2015). The data collection encompassed ten phases, aiming to get close to each choral leader, follow the analysis process with a holistic approach to learning and creativity as mediated and relational, through my contact as a researcher with the socially situated cultural practice and collective memory:

1. Each choir director was observed during six lessons, which equals a total of 24 observations.
2. At the end of each lesson/observation, the choir directors were asked to answer five questions. The five questions, or portfolio notes, were the same each time: *how does the lesson start*, *how does the lesson end*, *what do I think was good with today's lesson*, *what can I change/improve to the next lesson*, *other thoughts*.
3. By answering the same questions over time, different phenomena occur and become visible to the choral leader and for the researcher, individually and collectively. Therefore, after the end of the observation period, the choir directors were asked to summarize their written material on each question and produce a conclusion of the five summaries, which was handed in and discussed in one of the interviews.
4. The observation notes were compiled for each choir director in a document called 'Observations'.
5. One interview was conducted with each choir director. This was divided into two parts: (a) the choir directors talked about their portfolio notes and their work with the children during the observation period. They then handed over their portfolio notes to me, which gave them a chance to ventilate their reflections more freely. (b) During the second part of the interview I read and presented a written summary of my observation notes to each choir director, who then had the opportunity to comment on my observations. At the end of the interview, the choir director was given a written compilation of my observations. All interviews were filmed and took around one and half up to two hours.
6. During the spring of 2010, the choir directors met for three separate joint conferences, which were documented by the researcher.
7. The four choir directors and I met for a two-hour-long focus discussion after the completion of steps 1–5, which started with a spontaneous personal and collective summary of the past year. After about one hour, the focus discussion transformed into a group discussion that dealt with two, previously prepared,

themes: a) What form does the artistic aspect of working with a choir take? b) The leadership model A-S-K (Bygdéus, 2006) was introduced to the group (Bygdéus, 2015, fig. 1 chapter 4). The focus discussion was filmed in its entirety.

8. Each individual interview generated notes and footage for the first analysis.
9. The focus discussion generated text and footage for the first analysis (Bygdéus, 2012).
10. Follow-up talks (in the form of one individual interview each) (Alexandersson, 1994) took place 3,5 years after phase 1–9. Each individual interview generated recorded material and notes, which enhanced the study's validity and made a deeper analysis of the data possible.

In order to discuss a musical practice that takes learning and teaching into account, the study must encapsulate the content. Folkestad (2011) develops and describes how studies on learning and knowledge building need an analysis of the relation between *what, how* and *where*. My dissertation (Bygdéus, 2015) cover texts from twenty-four observations, observation notes, four individual interviews and one focus interview, portfolios, the observantes written reflections and filming of the interviews. The empirically driven observation and analysis work began in autumn 2010, followed by individual follow-up dialogues in December 2013 – January 2014. The content from these four recordings was the foundation for the deepened analysis work, phase 2, and a validity test of phase 1. Leading analytical questions concern *what* and *how*, based on the two observation questions. By studying the relation between what is being done, how it is done and where it takes place, it is possible to get closer to the activity; what happens between the choir leader and the group, what is expressed and which actions and activities can be interpreted and understood within the framework of the concept *mediating* tools.

Several phases of this design have a very strong integration of the research partners, which reminds forms of design-based research. A strong integration of the research partners is something I have developed during several studies (Bygdéus, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2012, 2015) to be close to the practice in my research interest of practice-based research in socially situated cultural practice and collective memory (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels, Cole & Wertsch, 2007) with a holistic approach to learning and creativity as mediated and relational.

Images of choir directors and their modes of working

The four observed choir directors, named Anna (A), Beatrice (B), Carl (C) and Desirée (D) illustrate how the work is conducted/analyzed on an individual and collective level below.

On an individual level; the four choir directors' actions and activities represent patterns for each choir director: (i) the rehearsal is seen as a meal with different dishes; (ii) storytelling with stories as the main thread, in which each song is placed in a context; storytelling; (iii) the choir director uses his/her own energy and enthusiasm, and focuses on the voice and sound production in the work with the choristers; (iv) the choir director uses eurhythmics as an integrated subject in the choir-singing.

Choral conducting in the practice studied, includes different communicative actions and activities between the participants. These are used to stimulate fantasy, memory and scenic practice in the form of movement practices, storytelling and the visualisation of pictures/images. The choir director carries visions and goals/targets which are transferred to the choristers through actions and activities, and stimulate children and youths to understand the piece of music in various ways. The social relations are there in both the music-making and during the breaks from this.

On a collective level, the breadth and variation of the choir directors' work are categorised in eight working approaches. Each mode has a certain approach and includes the perspectives of *what* and *how*, briefly commented on below:

1. a listening attitude;

   Yes. And listen to each other. You must be here and now, totally here and now. And that is what you do as a choir leader, all are here and now, without that there are no results. (C)

2. a variation in ways of working;

   As soon as I'm a bit tired or haven't planned well enough I automatically fall into this very traditional way, now we sit on our chairs, now we pick up our sheet music and start to sing from the beginning. […] But when I'm a bit extra alert or have focus on something extra difficult or new, or now I have to shape up, now I have to think about how to study this piece, then I work with much more variations. (A)

3. the use of musical routines;

   If we talk about children and youths they have a need for a certain security, they shall more or less know what is going to happen when they enter the room, where they shall sit, how they shall handle their binder, how the lecture begins. That is routines [...] they shall recognise what is happening and they shall understand that now we are learning something new [...] they shall experience that they are getting better and more capable. (A)

4. acting as a role model;

   I know for example that you use the words "be quiet now" fairly often instead of saying "listen", and that is a thing you can concretely work with. It's very good to record yourself, even if it's extremely boring to sit there and hear yourself saying "quiet" 25 000 times in 40 minutes [...] it is so easy to use a negation. (B)

5. concentrated cooperation;

   Conducting is a way to give commands. [...] That is what's so good, to suddenly be able to use another tool, to give commands, and not having to use your voice. (B)

6. reflection in practice;

   P: These quick decisions, what do you think they come from?

   A: Well, they come from, I mean if you don't think but just do ... like this. Then it's very spontaneous and very intuitive and if I stop and think and think about how to do now, get another second, then it's more of a choice between a couple of alternatives. Then I can make my decision based on tactics or planning, that I have thought this through. But quick decisions is the trade mark for choir leading work, and we make perhaps 245 decisions during one exercise. (A)

7. storytelling;

   I also worked a lot with pictures, I sketched, and it's perhaps only because I heard so many times that you have different ways to learn things, and one of them is picture memory, and especially for the children where I worked who don't have

Swedish as their first language, that it was very important to use picture memory as well, a possibility to attach that as well. (B)

8. the use of target images;

If you know the song by heart the body is prepared, and then the body will do what the brain is telling. (D)

A *listening attitude* becomes an approach in the contacts with the group/individuals, both in the choir director's bodily and facial contact with each individual and when addressing them, but also when listening to how the choristers sound together. The choir directors must vary their methods and use a *variation in ways of working*, ranging from the safe *musical routines* to testing something new and unknown. To achieve a balance between concentration, work and rest, short commands can help create focus, concentration and a way to continue with the work. In practice the choir directors act as *role models* by using the piano and their own voice and body. *Concentrated cooperation* includes both short commands and musical expression/interpretation through the use of the voice, the piano and the directing. Voice training and intonation develop the choristers' individual voices, part-singing and sound. Through *reflection in practice*, the choir director's own reflection and reflection with the choir and other choir directors, goals/targets and visions can be made more concrete and clear, on the basis of the choir directors' ability to change, negotiate and renegotiate their choral conducting. *Storytelling* provides an opportunity to create a context for musical learning. Clear and explicit *target images* make it easier to focus on joint projects with the choristers. All actions and activities the choir director uses in their work with children and youths can be described through these eight working approaches which interact in the work with choral conducting.

The eight working approaches might be placed in one of the two theoretical categories of physical and psychological tools, which enables descriptions of the choir director's use and combination of modes of work in their practical choral conducting. In a socially situated, cultural practice, all tools are psychological in their contexts. Below the cultural tools and artifacts presents on a collective level.

Cultural tools and artefacts in practical choral conducting

Many and various *cultural tools* in choral conducting have been identified in the analysis:

a) *Sight/vision and listening.* Sight/vision (in both inner and outer sense) is the choir director's tool both for seeing what is going on in the room, and to predict what is needed in the choir's work and what consequences different instructions might have. Listening is used by the choir directors as a tool to listen to what is sung and how it sounds musically, and to what is said and communicated in the dialogue with the group. Listening is also an inner tool in preparations and in the practical work in the rehearsals. By listening, the choir director implements their goals/targets and visions with their instrument; the choir.

b) *The speaking and singing voice.* The speaking voice is used for conveying instructions and information. The choir director uses various expressions and voices in the dialogue with the choristers. The singing voice is perhaps the most commonly used tool by the choir directors. *Call and response* and imitation of the choir director's instructions, using singing as a tool, is a frequently used form of communication.

c) *Music-making and musical variation.* The choir director's ability to lead the group in choir-singing is used to practise the group's joint expression and interpretation. Making music is an immediate and direct tool for communication, for finding joint interpretations, and for concrete practice of various musical aspects. For example, exercises might include shifts between the choir director's speaking voice and singing voice. Musical variation is used as a tool in exercises of various elements in a piece of music, for example text processing, quality of tune, intonation, part-singing, concentration, timbre and movements. Variation is used to facilitate musical learning and music-making.

d) *Gestures, respect, feedback and dialogue.* Gestures are the choir directors' tool to communicate with their instrument, the choir, through posture, gestures and directing. Respect as a tool means that the choir directors deliberately adopt a respectful attitude towards their choristers and their individual abilities and potential to develop the choir-singing. Children and youths have the ability for fast musical learning, but do not understand irony, and should not be exposed to this. Feedback and dialogue are tools used to verbalise a joint/common understanding of the choir directors' goals/targets and visions for the choir and its work.

e) *Vision and formulation of goals/targets*. Vision is a tool in which the choir director works with ideas of how the choir should sound and the work needed to achieve this, as well as how the ideas are implemented in the choir. Vision is a long-term and general cultural tool, but does not have to be clearly defined. The group needs time and maturity to develop the vision. A vision is related both to experiences of something, and to a desire to communicate this experience to the children, which also includes spatial experiences. The formulation of goals and targets – in both inner and outer senses – is used by the choir director as a tool in the preparations and in the dialogue with the choir. The tool is concrete and well-defined in character. The goals/targets formulated can concern for example rehearsals, concert projects, choir days, trips and recordings, but also how the choir is supposed to sound concretely.

f) *Piano and rhythm instruments*. The piano is a tool used to transform and communicate the choir directors' musical intentions to the choristers. The potential of the piano as a tool for musical learning in choirs is dependent on the choir director's ability to play the instrument, and to form character, style and phrasing by means of this. This is dependent on the choir director's ability to play the instrument. Rhythm instruments are used by the choir directors to exemplify different musical styles and arrangements. Rhythm instruments as tools become an integrated part of musical learning in a choir; to experience pulse and rhythm physically.

g) *Written music and paper*. Written music and scores are used as tools to convey information from a composer/arranger of music pieces that can be monophonic or polyphonic. The knowledge of reading music is trained successively in the practice. Paper is used as a tool to remember song lyrics, for information and other things the choir director wants to communicate to the choristers. The choir director uses notes and pens as tools in their continuous teaching to develop a joint/common understanding of musical learning.

h) *Boards, images, computer and discs*. Boards with pens, including coloured pens, are used to convey text, images, notes and information as a stage in musical learning and memory training, and to stimulate fantasy and memory in storytelling, lyrics and the role of music in various contexts. Images are used to communicate and illustrate stories, musical content and/or lyrics, with the aim of engaging the choristers and stimulate fantasy, memory training and sense-experience. Computer and overhead, including screen, are used when the choir director wants to show texts or images to the whole group. Projecting text and notes on a screen is a complement to the papers and notes in the binder, and it creates concentration and a joint/common direction

forward for the whole group. Discs and audio systems are used to play choir music, in role modelling and to illustrate goals/targets and visions in choir-singing. Shifting between different elements is common, in this case between recorded choir music as a tool, scores and dialogues about the music.

i) *Binders, music stands and chairs.* Binders are used by the choristers to compile their papers and notes. The choir director successively trains the Choristers in using the binder as a tool, and in using notes and paper in their choir singing. Music stands are used by the choir director, when standing in front of the choir. Music stands might also be used by the choristers when they stand in front of the group. Chairs have the function of giving the choristers a "home ground" in the choir. With a chair of their own, the choristers can feel safe in the room and have somewhere to work from and return to. The chair and the binder contribute to creating a tool defining the choristers' own space in the room.

A tool can have several functions and be used in different ways. Choral conducting often requires a combination of tools. An analysis shows that the choir directors' ways of working can be related to three factors: the choir director's childhood/upbringing, education and practical experiences of choral conducting. An interesting observation is that several of the choir directors' answers and statements indicate that they have not developed their knowledge during their formal education. They all say that they have had certain abilities before starting their education, or that they have developed their knowledge in their professional work, but they can rarely describe exactly where the tools emanate from. They present different opinions and descriptions of their university-level music studies. The ability to collect musical content and express underlying factors of a composition is dependent on the choir director's own childhood/upbringing and the surrounding environment.

Further development of tools as physical or psychological artefacts can increase the understanding of different levels of cultural tools. Such an analysis of primary, secondary and tertiary artefacts can be used to study the categorisation of the working approaches and their tools as physical, bodily, intellectual, mental or linguistic entities. The primary artefacts are physically concrete and manufactured/produced objects, whereas the secondary and tertiary artefacts are based on linguistic, intellectual, communicative, mental and discursive levels. All tools in a certain practice become tools with psychological aspects. They require a chain of thoughts, reasoning and a conclusion, which in practical choral conducting is done continuously in a choir rehearsal and in the choir director's individual planning and preparation.

The views and images of choir directors can be seen as secondary artefacts from the perspective of secondary artefacts as reproduction of understanding and knowledge, which provides models for the choir director on how the choristers should think and act. Models become representations, which help the choir director to organise the choral conducting.

The working approaches can be seen as tertiary artefacts, representing creative expressions and understanding, and are products of activities. The working approaches include the choir director's abilities regarding speaking, singing, music-making, musical variations, listening, feedback, respect, visions, formulation of goals/targets, and reflection; that is, the breadth and variation which constitute the collective level of tools in choral conducting.

In order for the cultural tools to work in practice, the choir director must have relational abilities. Relational ability is reflected in psychological aspects of using tools; *what* and *how* choral conducting takes place, what is mediated and how. Role models at different levels and in all ages, assimilation, and the ability to shift perspectives, are aspects of the work as a choir director necessary for the instrument – the choir – to develop and deepen in a context, as well as for the choirs to grow and recruit new members.

Choral conducting in practice: A discussion

When the choir director uses a cultural tool, for example the piano, to demonstrate a phrase or a musical character, an accompaniment or a style, the piano becomes a mediating tool used by the choir directors in their communication with the choristers. The choir director's thoughts and intentions are mediated through the ways in which the piano is used and the choir music is transformed. The piano both functions as a sounding role model and sends musical information through the ways in which the choir director handles and plays the instrument. Several stages of the work with making the music sound and progress with the group depend on the choir director's ability to use and vary the tools. With inspiration from Wartofsky (1979), the piano, depending on how it is used and what it mediates as a tool, might represent either a primary, a secondary or a tertiary artefact:

The piano as a *primary artefact* has its place in the room and in the context, and has a clear function as a tool. It has an obvious purpose, appearance and physical character.

An implicit meaning of the piano in the work is illustrated in expressions such as "let's do this without the piano" (Anna).

As a *secondary artefact*, the piano is used to preserve/maintain and extend what the choir director can keep in mind and include in the reflections of the music. In the sounding music, what Wartofsky (1979) describes as "production" through a secondary artefact, musical information is formed and communicated. In this way, the piano represents the choir director's ideas of musical interpretation, through the ability to use the piano and act as a role model. Wartofsky (1979) describes a secondary artefact as something that is used to preserve/maintain and extend, in this context what the choir director can keep in mind and include in the thought about the world, as representations of ways of acting. Representations which help people organise everyday life (Jakobsson, 2012) could be represented in the patterns which appear in the four images of choir directors:

1. The rehearsal is seen as a meal with different dishes.

2. Storytelling with stories as the main thread, in which each song is placed in a context of storytelling.

3. The choir directors uses their own energy and enthusiasm, focuses on the voice and sound production in their work with the choristers,

4. The choir director uses eurythmics as an integrated subject in the choir-singing.

The patterns used by the choir directors provide individual help for them to structure their work.

The piano as a *tertiary artefact* can inform us about more than for example a pitch or rhythm. As a tertiary artefact, the piano constitutes a world or worlds of imagined or pictured practice. Playing the piano exemplifies how people, in this case the choristers, can perceive and experience things through musical communication. The piano contributes to the communication and does not stand between the choir director and the choristers. Tertiary artefacts allow an arena or a scene and exemplify how people can perceive things. The eight modes of work in this study could be seen as examples of tertiary artefacts, in that the choir director's modes of work illustrate how the context with the choristers can be developed, for example how an inner vision of the choir director takes shape in the interplay and dialogue with the choristers. The

choir director has an impulse, through outer or inner stimulation, and replies with an impulse through the artefact. This has consequences for the representation of the artefact, which according to Cole and Derry (2005) indicates that there is a meaning integrated in the environment in which people are active, and the consequences are greater than the use of the artefact itself. The artefact leads to different forms of musical learning, depending on how the instrument is played and what is communicated and conveyed. Thus, in this study the piano also represents an artefact which the choir director uses as a tool with different shapes: physically, bodily, intellectually, mentally and linguistically. Similarly, as the piano can be interpreted and understood in different ways depending on how it is used, scores and written music might also represent different kinds of information. On the basis of the actual musical information in written music, the score might be seen as a secondary artefact, but in a deeper understanding and ability to interpret the world and messages, choir director's interpretation of the score makes it also possible to see it as representation of a tertiary artefact.

Methods and goals/targets that come with the use of primary artefacts form the basis for secondary artefacts (structure, social forms for organising the use, relationships), which enable the preservation and transfer of primary artefacts.

In the study, the choir directors talk about spontaneity, intuition, reflection, tactics, planning, experience and ideas:

> If I don't think too much but just do [...] it is very spontaneous and intuitive and if I stop and reflect on what I should do now, get an extra second [...] then I can base my decision on tactics, or a plan (A).

> Why you do things is very hard to know. [...] Sometimes you just have experience, and know that it actually works, or you base your work on an idea you've had (B). [my translation]

In line with the concept of the *personal inner musical library* (Folkestad, 2012), choral conducting experience interacts with spontaneous and intuitive actions, and ideas that develop through many different alternatives for action and in interplay with all their previous musical experiences. For the choir director, choral conducting means to create, model and sculpture music with their instrument, the choir.

The choir directors observed in this study talk about pedagogy and artistry as being impossible to separate, and the study shows that when all inner and outer knowledge

interacts, an artistic experience can occur. Using tools in choral conducting leads to several social actions which give the tools their mediating function (Vygotsky, 1934/1999; Daniels, 2001; Säljö, 2005). Good conditions and prerequisites as described by Erkkilä (2013) are a part of the social actions and thereby also a part of the mediating process between the choir director and the choir. It is a continuous interpersonal interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) where social actions are an important factor for the use of tools. In the meeting with a continuous interpersonal level they permeate the intrapersonal level and the individual knowledge (Wertsch, 1985). The two analytical concepts *action* and *activity* are interpreted and understood on the basis of *actions* being expressed on an individual level – four individual *images of choir directors* – and *activities* being expressed on a collective level – eight *working approaches* and many various *cultural tools*.

When people, in this case choir directors, show shortcomings, fantasy takes over and brings about actions which form thoughts, wishes and fantasy (Vygotsky, 1995). To be able to express music and communicate with the choir, the choir director must be able to shift between many different abilities in one and the same lesson/rehearsal. By raising the level of awareness of these shifts and use of different abilities, a strategy might be created for developing the choir director's musical ambitions, visions and social interaction with children and youths in choirs. Shifting perspectives (von Wright, 2000) is a foundation for the many decisions the choir directors has to make in their work, for example in a rehearsal. Choral conducting leads to musical learning. The choir director's ability to shift perspectives becomes evident. Alternately, the choir director takes in other people's thoughts, values and ways of reacting, expressed through the choir director's breadth and variation. Gradually, the mediating tools become available for the choir director through their leadership, craftsmanship and cultural tools, which are manifested in their modes of work in choral conducting. People's inner and outer communication (von Wright, 2000) is of help in understanding the continuous changes occurring in musical learning in choral conducting.

In choral conducting, the *I* communicates with the *Me*, when the choir directors practise to view themselves from the outside, that is, when looking at their own previous actions and reflecting upon them, quickly and continually. Similar to the ability to see themselves in the choristers' situation, the ability to reflect on their own actions through introspection is another aspect of the choir director's ability to adopt new perspectives. On the basis of Mead's perspective, awareness is a relation which exists in time and action in practice (von Wright, 2000). On the basis of reflection (Schön, 1983) as a tool, the supply of mediating tools can be extended. The ability to understand a

situation and work in a developing direction in a certain practice, in this case choral conducting, can be described as an ability to use reflection as a tool at different levels. In this study, different levels refer to what the choir director does with the group, in cooperation with different groups, with different individuals, and within themselves in their own continuous reflections. This means that tools are developed and gradually become available for conscious use. With reflection as a tool, each moment in a musical practice is an on-going work for the choir director, both before, during and after a joint activity. This makes reflection a tool which pushes the work forward. Mediating tools are represented by the different modes of work and many cultural tools used and combined, and there is pluralism in the choir director's work in the local, cultural context. Mediating tools are created in practical situations, in which also the choir as an instrument becomes one mediating tool. Thereby, ability and skills are relational, that is, they are developed in a relationship and interaction with the environment, and through the mediation that takes place in social processes. From a socio-cultural perspective this paper has been focused the interaction between people and the importance for the development of the individual, since it is in this interaction that learning, creativity, mediating tools and other cognitive skills are developed. This is one way of analysing relational perspectives in the practices of choir directors.

Acknowledgements

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Senior Lecturer, PhD
Pia Bygdéus
Linnæus University, Faculty of arts and humanities/Department of music and art
SE-351 95 Växjö
Sweden
pia.bygdeus@lnu.se