

How about equality and equity in higher music education?

A theoretical framework for researching quality of music teaching and learning

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Abstract

While quality development has an important role in higher education in Finland, its connection with equality and equity in teaching and learning music is not often mentioned. Most of the discussions about equality in education have focused on how to equalize access to and participation in education, but there are disagreements about what the very concepts of equality and equity mean in education. When striving to achieve equality in higher music education, the use of learner-centered pedagogies may promote an engaging and satisfying learning experience. We illustrate a more holistic approach in teaching and learning music by adapting the equality-equity model developed by Espinoza (2007) to give an overview of dimensions of equality and equity with reference to the different stages of the educational process at the music university level. Constructivist research and phenomenographic research in teaching and learning music suggest that the conceptions held by teachers and students about teaching and learning can be relevant factors in the pursuit of change in educational practices. On this basis, we develop a theoretical framework and suggest some remedies for the research of teaching and learning in music universities aimed at developing more holistic quality in higher music education.

Keywords: *Constructivism; Equality; Equity; Higher music education; Phenomenography; Quality*

¹ This work was undertaken as part of ArtsEqual Research Initiative and it was supported by the Academy of Finland's Strategic Research Council under Grant 293199/2015.

1. Introduction

“At the heart of teaching others is the moral imperative to care. It is the imperative to perceive and act, and not look away.” (Allsup & Shieh, 2012, p. 48).

This study discusses the quality of teaching and learning at the music university level (church music, classical music performance, composition and music theory, conducting, folk music, global music, jazz music, music education, music technology, and arts management) by providing an in-depth examination of equality and equity as a starting point in higher music education.

According to Allsup and Shieh (2012), it is important to notice and identify inequities in music education by shedding light on teachers’ teaching techniques and attitudes and by allowing students to enter curriculum with teachers as agents of change. To ensure that everyone has an engaging and satisfying learning experience, Lynch and Baker (2005) argue that there is a need for a more holistic approach to the achievement of equality in education, because most of the discussion about equality in education has focused on how to equalize access to and participation within different levels of formal education for different social groups.

Very often, equality is used as if it were interchangeable with equity, and as an idealistic and abstract concept, when considering education. For example, educational equality is mentioned as one of the six comprehensive themes in the evaluation of projects in education in Finland (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, 2016). In this study, we adapt the equality-equity model (Espinoza, 2007), which is grounded in the critical theory paradigm, to examine equality-equity in teaching and learning music in reference to the different stages of the educational process at the music university level. The goal is to develop a theoretical framework and suggest some remedies for the research of teaching and learning in music universities aimed at developing quality in higher music education.

2. Quality of teaching and learning in higher music education

People’s beliefs about normal and abnormal affect to the ability to perceive the world as if it could be otherwise (Allsup & Shieh, 2012). High quality professional development can provide music teachers with knowledge on student thinking and learning, which enables them to meet the needs of students when designing learning activities and curriculum materials (Bautista, Yau & Wong, 2016). Reform initiatives around the world emphasise the importance of using student-centric pedagogies and learning activities that respond to students’ ideas and interests (Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009).

In the same line, research in instrumental music instruction has shown that the beliefs and practices of constructivist teachers who focus on students' prior knowledge and motivations can have a positive impact on students' learning strategies, teaching and learning beliefs, studying autonomy, and sense of engagement in the classroom (López-Íñiguez & Pozo, 2014a; 2014b; 2016), all factors related to the quality of teaching and learning music. These results resonate with Johansen (2007), who emphasises the significance of systematically conducted research as a bottom-up activity - based on data collected from teachers' and students' experiences of teaching and learning processes within their specific subjects - when establishing quality systems in higher music education.

Quality assurance in higher education has been one of the most fundamental aspects of the establishment of the European field of higher education. The universities in Finland are expected to achieve high quality results, and demonstrate an ability for reform in action as well as for competitiveness and effectiveness (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, 2013). Espinoza (2007) questions whether there can be equality and equity in a society when the society prioritizes efficiency in resource management over social justice. He also shows that, although there are many discussions of equality and equity among researchers, there is disagreement and confusion about what those concepts mean and involve for the different levels of the educational system.

3. Equality and equity dimensions in teaching and learning for the different stages of the educational process at the music university level

Espinoza's (2007) equality-equity model is a valuable tool when pursuing a more holistic approach in teaching and learning at the music university level, because it considers equality and equity in terms of their interacting implications for social and educational policy which affects individual well-being. The model shows that it is not possible to argue for a simple conception of equality and equity.

According to Espinoza (2007), in relation to education, the concept of equality is usually connected with the idea of sameness in treatment, by stipulating the fundamental or natural equality of all individuals. The concept of equity is associated with fairness or justice when participating in education, through considering individual circumstances. Greater equity does not generally mean greater equality because, on the contrary, more equity may mean less equality. Table 1 illustrates an analysis of the dimensions of equality and equity in teaching and learning at the music university level.

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Stage of the educational process	Teaching in the music university		Learning in the music university	
	<i>Equality</i>	<i>Equity</i>	<i>Equality</i>	<i>Equity</i>
<i>Financial, social and cultural resources</i>	There are no financial, political, legal, social, and/or cultural constraints for teaching in music university	Teaching in the music university is offered with same resources to all those individuals or groups* who have same needs or potential to learn music	An individual is free to make a choice without any restrictions whether or not to study in the music university	All individuals or groups* who have same needs or potential to learn music have same amount of resources for studying in the music university
<i>Access to education</i>	Tuition in the music university is provided to all individuals	Instruction in the music university is provided same way for individuals and groups* with same needs, abilities and past achievements and different way for individuals and groups* with different needs, abilities and past achievement	All individuals are admitted to higher music education within the same context and/or in a separate but equal context no matter if they utilize that opportunity or not	Access to music university is provided for individuals and groups* to the same level with same needs, abilities and past achievements and to the different level with different needs, abilities and past achievement
<i>Educational attainment and achievement</i>	Teaching is provided to all music university students as long as they need it for graduating with good scores	Teaching is based on music university students' or groups'* equal needs and potential and effectivity to ensure equal level of attainment and achievement	All music university students can obtain the same level of educational attainment and achievement and complete degrees without any time limitations	Music university students or groups* with equal needs and potential gain equal level of attainment and achievement and equal resources are allocated according to same success and effectiveness in using past resources
<i>Outcome</i>	Music university degree guarantees that individuals gain wanted occupational status, income and political power	With equal music university degree individuals or groups* obtain equal jobs, income and political power	After graduating from music university, all individuals gain the kind of job and income they want and access to sites of political power without barriers	After graduating from music university, all individuals or groups* with equal needs and potential and achievement obtain equal jobs, income and political power

* socio-economic, ethnic, gender or other relevant category of individuals

Table 1. Equality-equity in teaching and learning music, in reference to the different stages of the educational process at the music university level. Table is adapted from the equality-equity model developed by Espinoza (2007).

4. Teachers' and students' conceptions about teaching and learning music

Some of the most relevant factors in pursuing change in educational practices are the conceptions held by teachers and students about teaching and learning, and in the field of music there can be found much research in this area (e.g. López-Íñiguez & Pozo, 2014a; 2016). From the perspective of investigating conceptions in teaching and learning music, constructivist research and phenomenographic research may offer feasible frameworks for aiming to achieve equality in higher music education.

Constructivism is a learning theory which finds similarly related representations in Dewey's, Piaget's, Bruner's, and Vygotski's ideas in the 20th century, concerning the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn and understand the learning process. According to constructivist principles, that understanding is constructed based on the learners' previous experience and background knowledge, and individuals construct their own new understandings through the interaction of what they already believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come into contact (see an in depth description in Pozo, Scheuer, Pérez-Echeverría, Mateos, Martín & De la Cruz, 2016).

López-Íñiguez and Pozo (2014b) have shown that studies of how teachers and students represent the learning and teaching of instrumental music during childhood tend to identify two extreme instructional positions: one focusing on the transmission of established knowledge, usually called traditional or transmissive, and the other, usually known as constructivist, focusing on the students' knowledge and capabilities. The later approach fosters cooperation through more dialogical learning spaces and promotes student metacognition and self-regulation. Teaching according to constructivist principles requires activating, stimulating, and developing the student's mental processes through reflection and scaffolding. The aim is for students to learn to autonomously regulate and manage their own cognitive and motor processes, and to build unique and inspiring representations of the music they play, through the guidance and supervision of teachers who focus on the students' reflective, metacognitive, emotional, and affective processes.

Studies on the conceptions and practices of teaching and learning music show that these still largely focus on transmitting the musical and technical knowledge needed to produce the correct sound (e.g. Bautista, Pérez-Echeverría & Pozo, 2010; López-Íñiguez & Pozo, 2014b; Marín, Scheuer & Pérez-Echeverría, 2013). These studies have found that there is a relationship between teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning and the way they process musical scores, such that simpler conceptions correspond to simpler processing levels, while constructive conceptions would promote more complex ways of understanding scores. According to Gaunt (2008), it seems that even though teachers are aware of the theoretical assumptions underlying constructivist models, very often they are unable to put them into practice successfully in the music classroom. López-Íñiguez, Pozo, and de Dios

(2014) argue that a conceptual change (in line with Vonsiadou, 2013) would make it possible to implement progressive changes in teaching practice, moving from traditional regular, repetitive activities towards more holistic instructional practices.

Another approach which can be considered in the implementation of research practices in the study of equality-equity in higher music education is phenomenography. Phenomenography is a research approach that is particularly aimed at questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an educational setting by considering people's conceptual thoughts (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Since the mid-1970s, there have been a large number of educational studies deriving from the work of Marton and Säljö (1997). The key concept that emerged was the approach to learning with its categories of deep and surface. The deep approach to learning means student's efforts to understand learning, critical and analytic studying, and managing entities. The surface approach to learning means emphasising study through repeating things and memorising. Subsequently, Entwistle and Ramsden (1983) added the third category of strategic approach to learning. Research has shown that a deep, strategic approach to studying is related to high levels of attainment in higher education (Entwistle, Tait & McCune, 2000). Entwistle (2009) emphasises that it is important to clarify for each subject area and each topic the processes of learning that are necessary to develop deep conceptual understanding. This stance is crucial in music universities, where one-to-one instruction comprises the main part of studying, and the differences in the contents and teaching methods of subjects and study programmes can be enormous.

There are a few studies on the approaches to learning in higher music education. In her study, Reid (2001) described the different ways that instrumental and vocal students experience, or understand, learning in higher music education. The research findings constituted five categories for the description of learning instrumental music: Instrument, Elements, Musical meaning, Communicating, and Expressing meaning. Sullivan and Cantwell (1999) investigated the planning strategies of university music students' learning of a traditional and non-traditional notated score, and the findings indicated that, even among the more expert musicians, deep learners were more likely to address a musical score at a higher level of meaning through the use of a deeper and wider array of processing strategies than surface learners.

5. Conclusions

Espinoza's (2007) equality-equity model, combined with constructivist or phenomenographic research, offers valuable findings when pursuing a conceptual change in teaching and learning music. The findings indicate that there is a need for a more holistic approach to the achievement of educational change, in terms of learner-centredness in the music classroom. Researching holistic versus traditional teaching-learning practices might eventually shed light on the effects that instructional practices have on equality and equity. When taking into account equality and equity in students' well-being, research on the workload in studies could be relevant, especially in the music universities, where students may face unique sources of stress, performance anxiety, perfectionism, and career concerns.

As Espinoza's model shows, it is not possible to achieve full equality and equity, but there is always the possibility to aim for increasing equality and equity in different stages of the educational process. Holistic instruction would cover those aspects sufficiently, therefore effecting equality and equity, because 1) all people are accepted to study and to be treated as individuals; 2) resources are available for everyone's needs; and 3) attainments, achievements, and outcomes are co-decided and co-assessed between the educational agents, acceding to the individual's needs, interests, potential, and capabilities. When considering equality and equity as crucial factors in quality development in higher music education, this has implications both for educational policy and also for practical changes in teachers' teaching and students' learning and well-being.

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