

THE EXPERIENCES OF SEVERELY VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to investigate the experiences of severely visually impaired students in higher music education. Higher education should be accessible to all and therefore policies must be created and implemented to ensure this. The experiences of students with impairments best show where barriers exist for such students and how they can be removed. This study is based on the social model of disability and the emancipatory research paradigm which is linked to critical pedagogy. The data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with three participants and the use of my own experiences. The findings of this study show firstly that attitudinal issues have a great effect on experiences. Secondly it is clear that the severely visually impaired student needs accommodations to be able to study. These are linked, above all to obtaining accessible materials and areas of study that are normally highly visually based. Whilst all participants had had positive experiences there were many barriers that had complicated their studies. This shows that higher music education needs to be made more accessible through policies and their implementation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the last few decades there have been efforts in many countries to broaden the student population in higher education institutions, to include those positioned as socially disadvantaged. There are two main arguments used to justify why widening participation in higher education is necessary. The first is the utilitarian argument according to which a highly educated workforce is necessary for economic development (Watts, 2006) and this is correlated with quality of government (Fortunato & Panizza, 2015). To achieve economic growth and quality of government, higher education needs to be opened up beyond its traditional middle class base. The second is the social inclusion argument - everybody should have the same life chances, including the opportunity to benefit from higher education. At face value these two arguments work together but in reality the utilitarian argument can widen injustice by blaming those who cannot achieve for their failure to contribute to the economy fully (Watts, 2006).

One of the groups which higher education has endeavoured to include are students with impairments. At the highest level of policymaking, The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) (Jones, 2015), the UK Disability Discrimination Act (1995 modernised 2005) and the Special educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) (Rowlett, 2011, p. 5-6; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010, p. 23) have attempted to prevent discrimination against current or future students with impairments in educational institutions through legally obliging them to accommodate the needs of such students. In Finland the law of equality "*Yhdenvertaisuuslaki*" came into effect in 2004 and although this is not a law specific to the needs of people with impairments, it attempts to reduce discrimination against any minoritized group (Lehtonen, 2011, p. 6).

However, legislation is not the only means towards inclusion. Indeed, legal requirements for higher education to cater for students with disabilities are not as widespread as in general education (Redpath et al., 2013, p. 1338; Rowlett, 2011, p. 5). For instance, institutions can refuse to admit students on the basis of worries about health and safety hazards. This is particularly common in laboratory-based and medical subjects but is not necessarily limited to these. (Lee, 2004; Riddell & Weedon, 2014; Tinklin & Hall, 1999, p. 188.) Although progress towards accessible higher education has been made, people with impairments are still under-represented in higher education (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010, p. 23), raising questions as to how this social group might be supported more effectively.

The multiple case-study reported in this thesis aims to investigate how severely visually impaired students experience higher music education, particularly focusing on aspects of accessibility and equality. My perspective is the same as Marc Brew's, dancer with Conoco Dance Company, that "disability might diminish opportunity but not talent" (cited in Scott, 2005, p. 7). Therefore, it is necessary to find new ways to support students with impairments in higher music education and these must be put into official policies.

In this paper I use the term *people with impairments* when talking generally about people who have some kind of physical, sensory or cognitive characteristic that means they function in a way that differs from the accepted norm of society. I have chosen this term because it conforms best to the social model of disability (see 2.1). When referring to legislation or problems caused by any external factor to people with impairments, I employ the term *disability*. Other terms may be used when quoting participants or other researchers. The term *severely visually impaired* is used in this paper to refer to someone with no vision or whose vision is so restricted that they cannot read normal printed text or music. The term *visually impaired* occurs when referring to other researchers' work, possibly including people with more vision. *Totally blind* is the term used for someone with absolutely no sight. This term was used by two participants to define their impairment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 DEFINING DISABILITY

There are many different models of disability, of which, two I present here: the bio-medical model of disability and the social model of disability. According to the bio-medical model of disability, an individual with a disability is a tragedy and a burden and they should be normalised as much as possible to conform to the ablest norms of 'mainstream' society (Rowlett, 2011, p. 20-22; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012, p. 40). Ableism as a concept shows that different abilities are defined by sociocultural groups as essential. The *lack* of an 'essential ability' i.e. an ability preferred by the sociocultural group, leads to exclusion from the ableist society (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012, p. 40). On the other hand, the social model of disability switches the focus from the individuals with impairments to the barriers, cultures and environments that cause problems (Oliver, 2009, p. 45). According to this way of thinking, it is society and not the person with an impairment who should change. This includes both physical changes, as in making facilities and materials accessible to all, but it also includes the challenging aspect of changing attitudes towards those who differ from the socio-culturally defined norm of the ablest environment (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012, p. 40).

2.2 HIGHER EDUCATION AND DISABILITY

According to Burchardt (2005, p. 31), the aspirations of young people with impairments are roughly the same as their peers. However students with impairments often achieve lower grades due to problems experienced during their education (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 276). Teittinen (2014, p. 94) describes three types of paths through higher education: the straight, the winding and the broken path. All of these paths are also possible for non-disabled students but seemingly problems are worse for those with impairments (Teittinen, 2014, p. 94). Since the 1990s there have been many studies which have looked to identify the causes of these problems.

One of the first broad studies done on the actual experiences of students with impairments in higher education was carried out by Teresa Tinklin and John Hall in Scotland in 1996 – 1997. The study highlighted 5 types of barriers faced by students with impairments: The physical environment, accessing information, Entrance to higher education, assumptions of normality and disability awareness. The researchers found further that many students were individually equipped by institutions to get round obstacles, rather than the obstacles themselves being removed (Brandt, 2011; Tinklin & Hall, 1999.) Sometimes personal accommodations are the solution and this is not denied by the social model (Rowlett, 2011, p. 26). If a student cannot carry their books and other necessary equipment personally, providing an assistant to do this may be a reasonable adjustment (Redpath et al., 2013, p. 1342). However if personal accommodations are seen as the *only* solutions it becomes clear that institutions are reliant upon a bio-medical model of disability (Mole, 2013). The five types of barriers identified by Tinklin and Hall (1999) have been taken as the starting point in many studies since (see Redpath et al., 2013).

2.2.1 ENTRANCE TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE DISCLOSURE OF IMPAIRMENTS

Whilst entrance to higher education should be solely a question of academic or subject specific skills, a study by Tinklin and Hall (1999) showed that physical accessibility, staff worries about health and safety issues and their opinions on whether reasonable adjustments can be made to the course, as well as the previous school experiences of people with impairments, make entrance to higher education for individuals with impairments subject to barriers (See also Hopkins, 2011, p. 712; Rowlett, 2011, pp. 41, 108, 117-118). Whatley (2007) also points to the differences in the prior experiences of people with impairments and how this can affect entrance to higher dance education and their later studies. This also applies in many ways to higher music education.

Another issue that Tinklin and Hall (1999) identified was that students were sometimes unwilling to disclose an impairment and therefore could not receive the necessary support (p. 192). In the UK and the USA students are required to disclose their impairments and provide medical evidence of them in order to be entitled to support (Konur, 2006). It seems,

however, that declaration is not always perceived as beneficial. Indeed, 25% of the students who declared an impairment in Vickerman and Blundell's study (2010, p. 26) reported not disclosing their impairment on their application form due to worries of not being admitted to their chosen course or its detrimental effect on future employability. The same concerns were expressed by participants in other studies (Konur, 2006; Redpath et al., 2013; Riddell, 1998; Riddell & Weedon, 2014). Most students, however, seem to find disclosure the better alternative and wish staff to know about their impairments to avoid misunderstandings (Redpath et al., 2013, p. 1342). Vickerman and Blundell (2010) stress that institutions of higher education need to show to potential students that impairments will not affect their opportunities and that they will receive support and understanding (p. 27). This is, I believe, a question of policy-making and enforcement which covers information about what support is given and staff awareness training, as it is staff who will often give the first impression of how a student will be treated (Hopkins, 2011, pp. 717-718).

2.2.2 ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Tinklin and Hall's (1999) writing of *assumptions of normality* refer to the difficulties experienced by students with impairments as a result of normalizing certain traits. For example, it is thought normal to be able to write course-work and exams in the *usual* way and to hear what is being said in lectures. If a student cannot do these things, they often have to repeatedly remind lecturers and peers and this can be emotionally hard (pp. 189-190; Hopkins, 2011, pp. 712-713). Continually having to restate needs to teaching staff and administration and having to be the mediator between Disability Services and faculties, causes considerable frustration and can take a lot of time (See Brandt, 2011; Holloway, 2001; Redpath et al., 2013; Rowlett, 2011).

Tinklin and Hall (1999) noticed that some staff had assumptions about students' needs rather than asking them or listening to what they said. An example was given of a student who lip-read. She had repeatedly asked lecturers and students to look at her when they spoke. Nevertheless a particular lecturer would constantly tell her fellow students to speak up so that the student in question could hear (Tinklin & Hall, 1999, p. 191; see also Brandt,

2011). Brandt (2011) also draws attention to the variations in accommodations given to students in Norway and that these were not always appropriate to the students' needs (see also Riddell, 1998).

Tinklin and Hall's (1999) research also pointed towards a variation of the understanding and awareness shown by academic and administrative staff which led to differences in the accommodations that students received. As Hopkins (2011) says, it is often easier to remove physical than attitudinal barriers. In many countries, institutions of higher education are required to make "reasonable adjustments" for students with impairments, raising questions as to what is seen to be "reasonable". Rowlett (2011) has considered both student and staff viewpoints on what is reasonable for print-disabled students. There is a question of cost to the institution and time on the part of the staff involved. Some staff also express worries about whether accommodations made for students with impairments advantage them over their 'non-disabled' peers (p. 110). Whilst some staff seem unwilling to assist students, not even allowing lectures to be recorded nor reading what they are writing on the board (Hopkins, 2011, p. 712), one member of staff in Rowlett's study said that "reasonable" was anything that didn't break the law nor take so much time that he would lose his job (p. 112; see also Holloway, 2001, pp. 602-603, 605). The willingness of staff to make accommodations is influenced by their view on the importance of education for those with impairments. This in turn is influenced by their knowledge of legislation, comfort in working with people with impairments and the support they receive from their institutions. (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 280.)

Many students report having positive experiences with Disability Services as well as both academic and administrative staff (Brandt, 2011, p. 116) The problem seems to be that the response of staff cannot be predicted and therefore levels of support vary even within the same institution of higher education (Hopkins, 2011, p. 720). This demonstrates the inequality within the system.

An example of attitudinal barriers is given by Hopkins (2011). His study showed that students who had assistants in the higher educational setting experienced problems with the

assistants themselves not doing what the person needed, and also that peers and teachers addressed the assistant rather than the student (p. 722). However, it has been shown that acceptance and understanding of those with impairments grows with experience, suggesting that staff and students are capable of learning and improving over time (Konur, 2006, pp. 360-361). Whilst this is perhaps commonsense, it puts extra pressure on students with impairments, as one student put it, "I didn't really think that I was going to have to be a walking deaf awareness course for three years." (Cited in Hopkins, 2011, p. 718). Attitudinal barriers are sometimes caused because the member of staff or peer feels uncomfortable when dealing with a person with an impairment. A student in Hutcheon and Wolbring's study (2012, p. 45) talked of 'dual disability'. By this, the student meant that the one person's impairment made the other person uncomfortable and therefore they did not act as they usually would or could and therefore that they became the one with the impairment. This is something that often affects music teachers when, for example, teaching technique to students who cannot learn in the "normal" way.

An area of modernization within higher education that can be of great use but also very difficult for print disabled students is internet-based learning-platforms and administrative services (Brandt, 2011; Rowlett, 2011). This is, at least partly, a question of attitudes. Many institutions do not pay attention to the accessibility of such platforms, and this has been the cause of several legal cases in the USA (Lee, 2014). There are, however, guidelines for the production of screen-reader-friendly websites and other computer software (see for example guidelines given by the World Wide Web Consortium). Institutions of higher education should follow such guidelines and they should look into the accessibility of software before it is chosen (Rowlett, 2011).

2.2.3 ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH IMPAIRMENTS

The most common types of accommodations made for students with impairments are in the field of teaching and assessment (see Redpath et al., 2013; Rowlett, 2011). Teaching should be varied and flexible (Fuller, Healey, Bradley & Hall, 2004) in order to accommodate the needs of students with impairments. Many students with different impairments need

teachers to provide lecture notes in advance and possibly in alternative formats. Many studies, however, report that lecturers do not always do this (Brandt 2011; Riddell, Tinklin & Wilson, 2004; Rowlett, 2011). Rowlett (2011) reports that this is because staff feel they have too much to do to be able to concentrate on individual students (see also Zhang et al., 2010). The consequence of this is that students select study modules and courses according to the support given and not their own interests and needs (Hopkins, 2011).

Delays in the delivery of accommodations are problematic. It is important for information to be passed on immediately, but sometimes the need for confidentiality complicates this (Redpath et al., 2013). An aspect that has increased difficulties for students with chronic illness and those students needing course materials in alternative formats, is that courses have often become more modular (Brandt, 2011). Some staff do not publicise reading lists in time for transcription and they are often unwilling to shorten lists to accommodate those who cannot get the material in or read it in the time allowed (Rowlett 2011, pp. 114, 159-161).

Some students need special arrangements for examinations including the format of questions, the way in which they answer and extra time. Staff feel that making adjustments to assessments is difficult, as it can be hard to guarantee that the level is the same for all (Konur, 2006; Rowlett, 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). Once again, faculty responses are non-uniform, they do not always take the suggestions of Disability Services into account and although forms of assessment are supposed to have become more diverse, which would help many students with impairments, seemingly the traditional methods are still most used (Brandt, 2011). Those who *do* use alternative methods of assessment feel this is fair and most students seem happy about the extra time awarded for doing assessed tasks (Rowlett 2011).

Many of the above mentioned attitudinal problems and difficulties with accommodations could be reduced by an increase in disability awareness and communication. Staff are more willing to adapt if they understand that their practices are disabling a student and disability awareness run by the disabled themselves is the most effective method for both staff and

peers to learn (Hopkins, 2011; Lourens & Schwartz, 2016). Studies suggest that there is a need for obligatory staff training on understanding and dealing with students with special needs and accommodations for them. It would also be important for changes to be made to remove obstacles on a general level. This will only happen if policies question the concepts of normality and embrace difference as a resource not a burden and if there are platforms where the voices of students with impairments will be heard and taken into account in policy-making and monitoring. Many problems could also be avoided if departments cooperated in questions of accessibility and accommodations. (Brandt 2011; Holloway 2001; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Mole, 2013; Redpath et al 2013; Rowlett 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). It is important for all staff and students to realise that accessibility is the responsibility of all not just those specifically employed to assist those with impairments (Mole 2013).

2.2.4 EXTRA DEMANDS ON STUDENTS WITH IMPAIRMENTS

Brandt (2011) emphasizes that whilst students with impairments spend as much time on their studies as their peers, they have to spend a lot more time organizing and enabling them (See also Hopkins, 2011). Extra time is spent physically getting from one place to another (Lourens & Swartz, 2016), repeating requests for assistance and passing on information about their needs (Brandt, 2011) and trying to obtain materials that others can simply borrow from the library or download from learning platforms etc. (Rowlett, 2011). Many Visually impaired students drop out of higher education due to not being able to get materials in time (Brandt, 2011). This is compounded by the fact that reading braille is slower and that the reader can neither scan-read nor highlight important sections for later reference (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). One student in Rowlett's study (2011) said that the extra work that has to be done makes you want to give up but that there is no alternative than to be stubborn (p. 194; see also Hopkins, 2011). There is an increasing pressure on students to graduate faster (Silvennoinen, 1996) and this is likely to make the time problems for students with impairments worse.

2.3. VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Visually impaired students are under-represented in most studies on the disabled in higher education (Rowlett, 2011, P. 1). This is, of course, partially because these students are underrepresented in higher education more broadly (Lewin-Jones & Hodgson, 2004, P. 33). Rowlett's study aimed to look at the views on accommodations made for visually impaired and other print disabled students in higher education. She splits barriers into institutional, non-institutional and attitudinal. Institutional barriers are those caused or posed by the institution itself whereas non-institutional are external e.g. by publishers being unable or unwilling to provide literature in alternative formats. Measures to reduce barriers can be anticipatory or responsive, some barriers are removed whilst others merely reduced (Rowlett 2011, P. 11, 13). Many researchers have emphasized that many anticipatory and general accommodations are of use to all students, not just those with impairments (Hopkins, 2011, P. 721; Mole 2013).

When working with visually impaired students, teachers should be able to appreciate that there are many different types of visual impairment. Different people react to their impairment in different ways depending on, for example, when they have become visually impaired and how they have been brought up. There are eye conditions that need completely different types of lighting, they can fluctuate a lot and a person may see or not see things that cannot be predicted by an outsider. Therefore teachers must be aware that the needs of visually impaired students will be personal (Rowlett, 2011). This also means that teachers must be willing to consult the student on their personal needs and willing to accept the students' explanations.

2.3.1 ACCOMMODATIONS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS

In some countries like the UK and USA, institutions of higher education have the responsibility of producing course materials in alternative formats. In other countries such as Finland and Norway this is the job of a central library (Brandt, 2011). Alternative formats are the most important adjustment that can be made for a print disabled student, but it is also

one of the most difficult. Publishers are often unwilling or unable to provide books and other materials in alternative formats and character recognition programmes are not faultless, even for standard text (Rowlett, 2011). However, delays in receiving materials and not being able to do background reading present serious problems for students. Scanning material yourself is time consuming and not being able to go to the library and look and read what you wish is frustrating and limiting (Rowlett, 2011). Teachers must be aware of the necessity to provide literature lists, key texts and other materials in sufficient time. Staff are, however, neither aware of the time needed for transcription nor of the problems it may cause in particular subjects like mathematics (Rowlett 2011), problems that are also seen when teaching and learning music.

Jenny Lewin-Jones and Joe Hodgson's article (2004) concerns the accommodations made for a visually impaired student who did a module in beginners' German language at university. The article intends to help other teachers who were in a similar situation. Whilst this article has some very useful points – for example making the whole group aware that the person in question may not react visually in the way expected and that names should be used rather than visual gestures (p.33), I felt the general attitude shown in the article was inappropriate. Whilst I do not, of course, know the situation the student in question was in, I feel it to be wrong to accept that a visually impaired student should be exempted from doing any written work due to the minimal extra signs used in uncontracted German braille (p. 35). The difference in braille codes was accepted by the teachers as a reason for exemption from written work. However grade one German braille would only have required the knowledge of twelve extra signs of which only four would be absolutely obligatory. Therefore I would question whether exemption from all written tasks is a reasonable accommodation. The article also states that a visually impaired student needs an assistant to be able to do pair-work (p. 33) and in the examination, which was only carried out orally although other students had a written exam as well, the questions were modified so that the use of a map was avoided but this changed the roles of the speakers rather than just giving the visual information orally in English (p. 34). These points possibly show an underestimation of what a visually impaired student is capable of and suggest a climate where the person isn't

allowed to learn what his peers do and the role of explaining basic things is taken from the peer doing pair-work and given to an assistant. Such a situation highlights the need for music teachers to learn to judge what is truly possible for the visually impaired student and remember that he/she has the same right to learn the skills that all other students do.

2.4 MUSIC IN GENERAL EDUCATION

Whilst there seems to be a lack of research concerning students with impairments in higher music education, there is a lot of research on teaching children with impairments in the inclusive classroom. Jones (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of research in this area in the USA from 1975 – 2015. She noted that most research looked into the attitudes of teachers towards teaching children with impairments, and suggests that even after decades of integrative education, teacher-training does not focus enough on how to teach those with impairments. The actual experience of teaching those with impairments seems to have a much more positive effect on teachers, their attitudes and abilities than theoretical courses (See also Zhang et al., 2010). Research has shown that teachers are likely to give higher marks to pupils they know to have an impairment than to their peers whose achievements are the same. This is thought to be due to the lower expectations for pupils with impairments and incorrect assumptions about what skills pupils with particular impairments can obtain. Since 2004, there has been more research on how to teach and on the usage of assistive technology in the music classroom. Nevertheless, band-leaders and choir conductors appear still to be worried about accepting musicians with impairments into their groups. There has been alarmingly little research on assessment, classroom practice and above all on the experiences of the impaired themselves (Jones, 2015). Many of the same things may well apply to higher music education.

Jellison and Taylor (2007) found that of 32 attitudinal studies within music education, only two had included children with impairments. One of the few studies that has been carried out on the actual experiences of pupils with impairments in music education was done by Haywood (2007). This case study looked at the experiences of a teenage girl who had been

excluded from choirs due to her physical impairment and how she had developed as a musician when she was allowed to participate.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the social model of disability which was inspired by a (1976) document produced by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation. This document states,

In our view it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society (p.14.)

This was developed by disabled academics like Michael Oliver (2009) with the aim of switching the focus from the individuals with impairments to the barriers, cultures and environments that cause problems (45). Supporters of the social model remind us that normality “is a construct imposed on a reality where there is only difference” (Oliver, 1996, p. 88). Every person is different, has strengths and weaknesses but society has made particular characteristics acceptable and has built itself according to the needs of the people who possess these. The social model has increased the strength of the voice given to the experiences of people with impairments and calls to reflection and political action (Terzi, 2005, p. 202). Although the social model has been criticised for not accepting the reality of physical differences, Terzi (2005) argues that the inability of a blind person to read non-verbal cues cannot be put down to society (p. 202). This is to a certain extent true – the fact that the person cannot use visual cues is due to the fact that the person cannot see them, but the necessity of seeing them is caused by society which often only provides visual information rather than tactile or audio cues. Therefore the social model is valid despite the fact that the physical impairment stops the person from being able to function in a particular way.

In this study I attend to the experiences of severely visually impaired students from the perspective of how society or higher education and thereby policy-makers can reduce disabling factors. Removing disabling barriers allows people with impairments to participate

in the mainstream of society. The social model of disability is strongly influenced by historical materialism, i.e. Marxist theory. In Marxist terms, removing barriers to higher education removes barriers to participation in the means of production.

Another way of looking at why education should be accessible to people with impairments is based on minority and cultural theories. These view disabled people as part of a socially constructed minority group. Under this approach, the minority group of disabled people are viewed as having rights in the same way as other minorities, such as ethnic minorities, do. This approach is also used to challenge the cultural representation and construction of disability (Garland-Thompson, 2011; McRuer, 2007). To successfully challenge discourse and ideology, disabled people must be able to participate, be that in the mainstream or otherwise. Therefore, including disabled students in higher education, and their subsequent inclusion in music and other cultural activities, is an essential part of challenging the cultural construction of disability.

Going further, this research is also emancipatory. Paulo Freire (2005) explains in the English translation of this revolutionary work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that only the oppressed themselves can fully understand what oppression is and therefore only those who have experienced oppression can emancipate themselves and also their oppressors from the oppressive situation restoring humanity and equality. If the attempt comes from the side of the oppressors, it will always fail (pp. 43-45). In his introduction to the thirtieth anniversary edition of the same work, Donaldo Macedo (in Freire 2005) states that Freire believed that those suffering hunger need to be shown that this is due to social constructions and how the forces behind such constructions can be identified (p. 20). This way of thinking has been adopted by disability research, where the emancipatory research paradigm is seen as the ideal. This paradigm is primarily characterised by: reliance on the social model of disability; the inclusion of disabled people (both as researchers and research subjects); the goal of challenging rather than accepting 'social oppression'; and the accessible dissemination of research findings. Thus research is used as a tool not just to explain discrimination and oppression, but to challenge it. In this study, this takes the form of barrier removal and the promotion of disabled people's individual and collective empowerment. From this

perspective the role of the researcher is to help facilitate these goals through the research process (Barnes, 2003).

True to this research paradigm I am myself severely visually impaired and have studied music at two institutions of higher education. The participants in this study are all severely visually impaired and the findings of this study are intended to help policy makers and teachers become more aware of the factors influencing the studies of such people thereby helping them to improve conditions in the future. This can only be achieved by publishing the results and this will be done in a format accessible also to those using screen readers.

Chapter 4: Methods

The central research task of this study is to acquire a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the positive and negative experiences of severely visually impaired people studying music in higher education. This task was investigated through the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that create positive experiences for severely visually impaired students of music?
2. What are the factors that create negative experiences for severely visually impaired students of music?
3. How can the experiences of severely visually impaired students be taken into consideration when enacting policies of inclusion and accessibility in higher music education?

This research is a qualitative multiple case-study. I chose a qualitative approach as I wished to research the experiences of a small group of people and wish to give the subjects of my research the possibility to freely draw my attention to all aspects of their experiences (Ronkainen, Pehkonen, Paavilainen & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2014, p. 82). Therefore a highly structured, quantitative approach is not appropriate (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 51). A case-study can be used to gather detailed information about a person or group. Their strength is in the richness of the data collected. (Coolican, 2014, Case studies, para. 1 and 5.) The use of a multiple case-study enables the researcher to get detailed understanding of several people with a common characteristic or interest (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 56). In this study all the subjects were severely visually impaired and had experiences of studying in higher music education. Whilst multiple case-studies have been described as a series of experiments rather than a method of data collection (Coolican, 2014, Case Studies, para. 7) different cases can surely broaden the perspective and if reoccurring aspects are found, make the results more reliable. Additionally, it has been seen in research areas such as psychology, that a single case study, which would normally not be seen as generalizable, can completely change the understanding of the field (Coolican, 2014, Case studies, para. 6).

4.1 DATA COLLECTION

I collected data by means of semi-structured, individual interviews (Ronkainen et al., 2014, p. 116). I interviewed three severely visually impaired people who have studied or are studying music in higher education. Each participant was interviewed twice. The first interview concentrated on their background, particularly pre-higher educational musical background. The second interview concerned their experiences of studying music in higher education from the perspective of their impairment. The interviews were between 30 and 75 minutes long. The reason for interviewing my subjects about their background is that the severity of their visual impairment and possible changes in vision as well as the opportunities to different aspects of musical education before application to higher education is likely to have a profound effect on experiences in higher education (Hopkins, 2011; Moore, 2013; Whatley 2007). The interviews were not highly standardized to maximize the opportunities for the interviewees to give all relevant information (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 76). I worked with a list of subjects about which I wanted information but these subjects we discussed in any order as was appropriate in the interview situation.

Two of the interviews were carried out in English via Facetime, as the participants in question are resident in the UK and the USA. The third interview was conducted face-to-face in Finnish over a cup of tea and slice of cake. As a severely visually impaired student of music, I was able to build up an equal and relaxed relationship during the interviews, which is particularly important in qualitative interviews (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 83).

The first interview with each participant included discussions on the following subjects:

- The participant's impairment and possible changes in the amount of vision they have.
- Instrumental or vocal tuition prior to higher education including the attitudes of the teachers involved.
- Music theoretical tuition and the acquisition of braille music skills.
- Other musical activities and school music.

The second interviews were structured similarly using the following themes:

- Application to higher education,
- Instrumental/vocal tuition in higher education,
- Theoretical subjects,
- Productions and large scale projects in higher education,
- Accessibility of information, and services on internet-based platforms,
- Social aspects of studying,
- Other.

4.2 THE PARTICIPANTS

The selection of subjects for this study has been made on the basis of severely visually impaired people I have been able to contact, who have recently studied or are studying music in higher education. The number of possible research participants is very small and institutions of education do not keep records on students with impairments who have been accepted to study. I therefore contacted two people I personally know and posted a short request for possible participants through the e-mailing list run by MENVI (Music Education Network for the Visually Impaired). I received two replies of which only one was written by someone studying music in higher education. I have also used my own experiences in this research to widen the perspective on certain areas.

Claire

Claire has studied singing at a music college in London. She had a certain amount of sight as a child and learned the basics of print music but had to get too physically close to the page for it to have been any use in music tuition. As a child she learned to play the piano using the Suzuki method and learned everything by ear. At fourteen she started singing lessons with a teacher who had a negative attitude towards her opportunities as a singer due to her visual impairment. Claire started to learn braille music shortly before transferring from mainstream school, where she sat her GCSEs to a school for the visually impaired, where she also sat her A-levels including music. She felt that learning braille music was challenging and keeping up

at A-level in an environment, where pupils were expected to be independent in study strategies and proficient in braille music reading skills was somewhat overwhelming.

Christopher

Christopher is in his second year of music education at a private university in the USA. His major instrument is clarinet. Christopher has been totally blind since birth. He also played the piano all through his childhood, after his parents had found a Suzuki teacher who had already taught visually impaired children. He started the clarinet at school and played as part of the school concert band. His teachers were all very encouraging even when Christopher himself was uncertain about whether he could participate in marching band. The directors of band and choir took considerable time to record him the music he required in their own time. His higher school choir director developed a system of “music notation” with Christopher, which was easier than the standard braille music code but when Christopher decided he wanted to study music in higher education, his teachers encouraged him to learn the standard braille music code. Christopher did this via distance study courses given by a school for the visually impaired in the USA. By the time he started in higher education he could easily read single line scores for clarinet or vocal parts but more complicated scores were still difficult. His theoretical background was limited but this seemed not to be worse than his peers.

Olavi

Olavi has studied for three years at a Finnish university of applied science, which offers a 4,5 year course in pop-jazz music with a teaching qualification. He plays an instrument which is very unusual in the pop-jazz scene. I do not refer to which instrument Olavi plays as naming it would compromise his anonymity (see section 4.5 of this thesis). Olavi has been totally blind since birth and started his musical tuition on his current instrument at his local music institute aged seven with an emphasis on classical music. He learned everything by ear and despite the structured system of the Finnish music institutes he did not receive any theoretical tuition until several years after his peers. Even then, he was not taught braille music and he could not link the material covered in any way to the music he was playing.

Although his teacher recorded the pieces he needed to learn for his individual lessons, this happened during lesson time and the teacher did not allow him to play in a group with his fellow instrumentalists but rather filled in his obligatory column for this by playing duets with him in normal lesson time. Olavi was in further education partially at a conservatoire for pop and jazz music and partially on a music course at an institution for students with special needs. During this time he learned enough braille music to be able to write musical notation for himself and catch up in theoretical subjects. Partly due to the nature of pop-jazz tradition but also to his preferences, he has never transferred from learning his repertoire by ear.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, only omitting filling words and any parts that were completely irrelevant, for example offering more cake. As the thematic analysis of the content did not require detailed information about the non-verbal aspects of communication (Ronkainen et al. 2014, p. 119) I did not include all aspects of intonation.

Transcribed material was approached using thematic analysis, which is a method for “identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning in qualitative data” (Clarke & Braun 2017, p. 297). Thematic analysis is not bound to a particular theory such as Grounded Theory (Coolican, 2014, Thematic analysis, para 2) and can be used to identify patterns within and across data looking at people’s lived experiences (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). I used a data-driven approach (Coolican, 2014, Thematic analysis, para 3) looking for underlying themes in the data without preconceived notions of what the final themes would be. I compared each interview with the others and with my own experiences to produce one thematised text (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 121-122). A researcher always has subjective experiences and they do not need to be excluded from research (Ronkainen et al., 2014, p. 70). Although I intended to also use my own experiences as a reference of comparison, I was careful not to let this influence the direction of the interviews or my analysis. This is important to uphold if the researcher wishes to discover something new (Ronkainen et al., 2014, p. 71; Rowlett, 2011).

Six themes were identified in the collected data,

1. Attitudinal issues,
2. Accommodations including, above all materials and examinations,
3. Challenging areas of study,
4. Other issues of accessibility,
5. Knowledge and availability of disability support,
6. Suggestions and advice for the future.

4.4 RESEARCHER POSITION

I have been severely visually impaired since birth. Although I have a little sight which is useful in mobility and orientation, I have always used braille. I learned braille music at junior school and used it in instrumental and vocal lessons regularly during my childhood although learning purely from braille music was challenging at that stage. I studied at a university of applied science for three years on the music performance programme with singing as my major instrument and was accepted into the Sibelius-Academy's Church music department in 2012. During my higher music education I have encountered several situations where my impairment has caused problems. Sometimes I have received help and support from teachers but sometimes I have been left to cope with them on my own and there have been occasions when I have been on the border of giving up because I could not get any assistance or understanding. Therefore I wish to bring such aspects to the attention of teachers and students who may be confronted by severely visually impaired students in the future.

4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research participants are quoted here using pseudonyms, and their identities are treated confidentially. This approach normally increases the interviewees' truthfulness (Patel &

Davidson, 2011, p. 76). All applicants were sent an e-mail before their participation including two attachments: a letter explaining about the study and their rights as participants (Appendix 1) and a consent form which the participants returned to me, having filled in their full name (see Appendix 2). This was done by E-mail and without traditional signatures to improve accessibility for the participants and researcher.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

Whilst analysing the interviews it became apparent that it is sometimes difficult to separate positive and negative experiences from one another. Sometimes a barrier can result in staff reacting so positively to the student that the experience was in its own way positive. I therefore used thematic analysis (see 4.2) to discover themes in the data and analysed how these areas have affected the participants' higher music education.

5.1 THE EFFECT OF ATTITUDES

As discussed in chapter two, attitudes of staff and other students towards students with impairments can become barriers but a positive attitude can remove potential problems. Christopher's experiences were a perfect example of this. He visited the three music departments to which he was considering applying. He described his experiences at the first university,

I walked into the music department at the university and I met with one of the chairs of the department. He wasn't the top person but he was high-ranking at the school of music there. Before he even said "Nice to meet you!" or anything, he said: "You want to be a music education major, right?" I said "Yeah!" and he said, "You're going to have to change your major. There's no way you can be successful in music education because you're blind". (Christopher)

This was exceedingly discouraging for Christopher who became uncertain about his choice of subject and opportunities to study. As a young applicant who was shocked by the reaction he did not question the person any further. This has also already affected his future plans,

Well that school has a very good Master of Music programme, where a lot of people go for their masters' degree. You know, I won't consider going there in the future when I'm ready to look at a Masters' degree because that's how they treated me the

first time so I'd definitely go out of state for a Masters' degree just because I wouldn't be comfortable going there. (Christopher)

This aptly illustrates an oppressive attitude (Freire 2005). If the person in question had said the same thing on account of race or gender it would certainly have caused justified uproar. The person in question probably saw problems he believed to be genuine but there is no reason why a severely visually impaired person cannot study Music Education or teach. The attitude could well have prevented Christopher from studying his chosen subject.

Fortunately Christopher visited two other universities who were very positive about his choice of subject and had already thought about what accommodations they could make for him. Claire's experience of application was also positive as none of the colleges she visited saw her impairment as something negative. Olavi's first impression of the attitude of his future institution of higher education was also mainly positive. The majority of questions asked in the interview were reasonable and logical although one teacher seemed to fully underestimate his abilities,

Well there was one... One of them asked if there's any way I can write pieces of written work. I mean I'd been to school and had the necessary qualification to apply to higher education so that was a bit... I didn't make a fuss about it but it was a bit of a stupid question. (Olavi)

The opposite attitude came to light in Christopher's experiences. His singing teacher, who was head of the school opera convinced the reluctant Christopher to join the opera choir and be part of a production by Puccini. He was to be as active on stage as all the others and was given appropriate assistance for this to be possible. My own experience of opera productions has been the opposite – I have wanted to be involved and have had plenty of ideas how possible problems could be overcome, but responsible directors and teachers have been extremely negative, restrictive and unwilling to listen to my point of view. This once again shows a lack of respect for the person with an impairment and unwillingness to enable emancipation (Freire, 2005). Christopher's experience of a teacher encouraging him to go outside his own comfort zone and do things he thought would be difficult, was

extremely positive and demonstrates that openness brings results. Clair's experience of attitudes towards her being in productions is between the two extremes. She herself was uncertain how to cope with it, including getting the materials and coping with movement and expression. Her college never refused to let her be in anything she would have wanted to but also let her not participate in obligatory productions if she did not want to. This could be seen as a type of positive discrimination but also shows something about attitudes. Claire herself suggested that they may have been unwilling to produce the material but it could also have seemed easier all round for her not to be in it if she didn't want to be.

All participants mentioned some teachers who have been unwilling or unable to change their methods of teaching or have not asked the visually impaired student how best they could alter their methods to accommodate the person in question. Claire reported that her first year's music history teacher never had any accessible material and that many teachers came to ensemble lessons unprepared and therefore let the group sight-read, which more-or-less excluded Claire from participation. This seems to be an example of staff working from a more bio-medical than social model of disability. These teachers did not see it as their responsibility to make their lessons accessible but made a lack of accessibility the problem of the student with an impairment. Olavi changed instrumental teachers during his first year and the new teacher was the first ever who did not ask Olavi for advice on how best to teach him. Whilst the new teacher eventually discovered a good method by himself, several months passed before he started giving technical advice, as is discussed later in this thesis. Christopher had a conducting teacher who, "kind of has only one way of explaining things" (Christopher). When this did not work for Christopher, he had to go to other teachers and his peers for extra help.

Christopher commented that he felt uncomfortable at first in his hall of residence, because he was amongst people whose interest were completely different and because "they didn't know what to do, is the feeling I got" (Christopher). This is a typical example of 'dual-disability' (Hutcheon and Wolbring, 2012). Claire's experience with her peers was also affected by a feeling that she had to prove herself to them. Olavi brought up the point that it is difficult for a visually impaired person to find their friends in a crowded environment like

the cafeteria and that few people seemed to consider this. He also drew attention to the fact that a lot of the band-rooms were extremely chaotic. This, he said, was also a problem for sighted students, but as a severely visually impaired person it was very bad. Whilst there had been talk of improving this, nothing had happened. This is, I believe, an attitudinal problem – an inability to consider the needs of others. It certainly does not affect just those with impairments, but is particularly frustrating for those who do have. Music stands left at head height just inside doors and chairs, tables, instruments and cables all over the floor are dangerous and/or restricting for anyone who cannot freely move around to avoid them.

The majority of experiences showing people's attitudes were however positive. All participants report having made good friends amongst students. Peers have never complained about accommodations made for the visually impaired student and have been willing to help. A reoccurring theme was the willingness of many teachers to give up their own time to help the severely visually impaired student get around barriers. Both Olavi and Christopher highly praised their music theory teachers for spending time with them to overcome problems and make sure they could keep up with the class. Christopher and Claire were also highly positive about their vocal/instrumental teachers' willingness to spend time showing and reshaping aspects of technique and trying in all manners to explain things which are often obvious to their sighted peers. Whilst this is very positive it does leave a question: the staff in question were not getting paid for this extra work and the students were not getting extra lessons to overcome these problems. Therefore the success of the students was dependent on such willing and kind teachers. This is not something that can be relied upon. As an example I bring in my own experience of a production at the university of applied science at which I studied. The production was obligatory for me. I had a small solo role and was in the choir. Originally the responsible teachers had not wished me to be in the choir but I insisted upon it, as all other soloists with small roles were. When the choir had to dance, the producer asked me to go and sit down and wait. She did not have time to teach me the dances. There is no reason why a severely visually impaired person cannot dance if they are shown what they need to do. I was not prepared to be treated in that way and therefore went to the Student advisor and study planner. I was informed that they did not

have resources to give me extra assistance and the teacher was not willing to help. Fortunately I was friends with a student studying music theatre and she volunteered to come to all of our rehearsals and show me what to do. The end result was that I could participate fully and the producer had to admit that I danced well. Without an extremely kind friend I would have been unable to do this and would probably have left the production completely as a form of protest. This would have made it almost impossible to graduate. The teacher producing the opera was not willing to give up her time to help and the institution was unwilling or unable to use resources to assist me. Whilst this and other similar situations caused me emotional distress, I am a strong-willed person and I am aware of my rights. Therefore I was able to partly overcome the oppressive attitudes and thereby achieve some degree of emancipation but I had been unable to force the institution of higher education to change their policies or possibly even attitudes.

5.2 ACCOMMODATIONS FOR SEVERELY VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS OF MUSIC

5.2.1 OBTAINING SCORES AND OTHER PRINTED MATERIALS

One of the largest problems facing a severely visually impaired student, is how to obtain materials. This is particularly the case in music as musical notation cannot be scanned reliably. Whilst sighted students of music can normally obtain printed music from libraries, buy it or download it from the internet, the amount of braille music available is minimal in comparison. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), in the U.K., the Library of Congress in the USA and Nota, in Denmark, have a certain amount of braille music available. My own experiences of obtaining music through the RNIB and Nota are that there is a reasonable amount of piano and organ music, some vocal scores but much less available for other instruments. But as an example, although the choir parts for Mozart's Requiem were available through the RNIB, the three quartets sung by the soloists were not. Repertoire is limited for any instrument and if a score is available there is often only one edition, which

may be very old and no longer regarded as reliable. Modern music is very poorly represented. Nevertheless students of music have to learn repertoire.

Olavi learns all of his music by ear. This is, of course, more usual and possible in the pop/jazz scene as there is more improvisation and opportunities to vary what is played,

The genre is kind of like that you don't play 'finished' arrangements. So the printed music thing isn't really an issue. It's more melodies and chord symbols. I record quite a lot. (Olavi)

Olavi also explained that he uses his instrumental lessons to record chord progressions and other things that have to be learned precisely. His peers send him links to tracks on YouTube when they write out scores for other sighted colleagues. This works well for Olavi. He did however stress that music theory had been difficult because of the lack of materials. Some things were done from hand-outs made by the teacher. He did not get these in an accessible format but the teacher had tried to help by reading him things. There were books that were recommended, but these were not available in braille and the Finnish library for people with reading difficulties, Celia, was not prepared to produce this sort of material. Celia is obliged by law to produce obligatory study materials. There are two problems to this system for students of music – few materials are often strictly speaking obligatory and secondly, even if they are, Celia is unwilling to produce braille music. Celia produced a book for me in my first year, which was obligatory for a music history exam. About two thirds of the book (Haapasalo, Juhani ...Tekstimotetista kantaattiin) is composed of music examples, to which the text refers. Celia produced only the texts despite my saying, that I needed the music examples.

Similarly, Claire had great problems obtaining materials. At the time, there was no Disability Services at her college of music and they were not yet obliged to produce all materials. She used readers and a pianist to dictate and play music to her. Her singing teacher recorded songs for her and she learned from professional recordings using libretti and the Lieder and Art-songs Text page on the Internet. She also spent hours in the library scanning text-based materials. This caused her to feel inadequate and put a lot of pressure on her:

Cause it was loads of extra things we had to do. I spent half my life in the library I was scanning stuff in, and I was... [...] I was just sitting there at the scanner and embossing things, It was tough. [...]I started to go under but then I thought: "No, you've got to get your act together". So I worked my butt off and just thought "Everyone else has only to do half the work you do but it's tough". (Claire).

Claire confirmed, however, that the system has improved now that legislation covers music college's so that they are obliged to transcribe materials. Christopher uses the Library of Congress for any scores available from them. This worked well for piano and his first year's analysis courses. However his university has bought the Goodfeel software produced by Dancing Dots (www.dancingdots.com) with which anyone who reads print music can scan in music or write print music in Lime and then convert this to braille. His university produces all materials that he needs with the help of students on 'Work study'. His university is private and as part of the financial scheme students can work for the university to help pay their tuition fees. If materials are needed for examinations, these are often transcribed externally as some of the students involved in producing material for Christopher are on the same course. This is organised by Disability Services and has worked well. They produce anything from repertoire for his major instrument to pieces for choir and orchestra.

My personal experience is nearer to Claire's. During my time at the university of applied sciences I was completely responsible for my own materials with no assistance from the institution or anywhere else. With some few exceptions I had to learn from professional recordings using libretti and texts available from the Internet – this included opera ensembles, where the libretto has no repetitions and it can be very hard to hear who is singing what. During my time at the Sibelius-Academy I have had seventeen hours a month of personal assistant time, paid for by social services. I have used this time completely for the production of braille music through the Goodfeel software. The responsibility for finding an assistant capable of this is mine. Seventeen hours a month is sometimes adequate but sometimes not. When materials are needed quickly or a lot at once, it is stressful and limiting. I have, however, only had one course that I have had to abandon because the teacher gave materials with too little notice for me to be able to get them at all.

The question of the availability of materials is not simple. However in our modern-world, where almost all materials are in some kind of digital format, a supporter of the Social Model of disability can well ask, why more cannot be done to produce accessible materials in general. There is also an issue as to why copyright laws in many countries prevent print disabled people from making materials they themselves have produced, available to other print disabled people.

5.2.2 OTHER NECESSARY ACCOMMODATIONS

There are several other areas in which a severely visually impaired music student needs accommodations to be able to study successfully at the same rate and level as their sighted peers. One topic that came to light in this study was the learning of repertoire. Whilst Olavi does not use braille music for repertoire, he still, as any other severely visually impaired student, has to learn everything of by heart to be able to play it at all. One of the things he was worried about before starting his course, was whether he would get materials in time and would be able to keep up with his peers. For Olavi this seems to have worked relatively well. He does, however, have to use his normal instrumental tuition time to record particular pieces or chord progressions. This is something his sighted peers do not have to do and therefore it was seem like a reasonable accommodation to give him some extra tuition. This is however, in Finland, not a legal requirement.

Christopher was also concerned about whether he would be able to learn enough music off by heart and do this from braille. His clarinet teacher tends to do a lot of sight-reading and technical studies with his pupils. Christopher could not do this in the same way. He and his teacher have reduced the amount of such pieces he has to play. There is no obligatory repertoire lists that have to be followed and they have reduced the amount he has to learn by using sequences and well-known melodies to train technical aspects of his instrument. He is aware that he cannot learn as much repertoire as his peers on the organ but as this is a voluntary subject, it does not matter. It does however highlight the disadvantage at which the severely visually impaired student is placed – organists always use music, even in

performances, but a braille music reader must learn bar by bar- off by heart, even to be able to play in a lesson.

Claire received one extra lesson a week with a pianist tutor to help her learn repertoire. The tutor would play her pieces metronomically and the accompaniments in a normal way to help her understand the music and learn it accurately. This seems to be a good accommodation under the circumstances.

I have only recently become aware myself, how much practice-time I spend learning repertoire of by heart. The Finnish system of examinations with structured repertoire puts pressure on the student and teacher to constantly learn new pieces. I wonder whether I should not have requested a reduction in the demanded amount of repertoire, so that I could have spent more time on the artistic and technical aspects of what I was doing.

Another area where accommodations are required is theoretical subjects and examinations. All participants reported some difficulties with theoretical subjects. Olavi and Christopher both praised the willingness of their theory and oral skills teachers to help them. Olavi had to use an external assistant to get oral skills materials and produce his own written work. This was also the case for arrangements he had to do for band lessons and this was very time consuming. Christopher also commented on the extra time he had to put in to get through theory, especially at the beginning when his braille music skills were not so good. Harmonisation was a particular problem due to the nature of the computer-based software he was using and because a braille display only has one row, which makes the comparison of parts particularly difficult. Claire also emphasized the difficulties of analysis for someone who is not highly competent in braille music reading.

Claire and Olavi both did their theoretical entrance exams by using a reader/scribe. Claire reported that she was unable to do the string quartet arrangement required of her as it was too difficult to do it in her head and there was no way of her brailleing it. On top of this, there was not enough time. The responsible teacher did not see this as a problem and she did not have to replace it with another exercise. Olavi could, at least theoretically, have had his theory paper transcribed by Celia. He did not request this because of his difficulties reading

braille music. As some teachers are uncertain about how fair accommodations for students with impairments are (as presented in chapter 2 of this thesis), we discussed whether this method was fair as a sighted person with a pop/jazz or folk music background might also not be able to read scores and this would have stopped them from gaining marks in the theory examination but they couldn't have requested accommodations. We did not reach a conclusion.

Christopher did his initial oral skills level test completely orally but could do the theory in class with the other students. His institution gets examination papers, which need to be put into braille, transcribed externally. Disability Services is responsible for organising such examinations. He reported that there have been occasions, when teachers have, despite timely reminders, forgotten to submit materials in time and therefore his examinations have had to be rescheduled. For examinations which can be done electronically Christopher is responsible for organising this with the appropriate teachers.

My own experience is that some teachers do not remember to bring electronic papers to examinations even when I have done several examinations with them and reminded them in advance. There is also no means of submitting information on special needs on the enrolment form for general examination days at the University of the Arts (Last accessed 7th May 2017). More concerning, however, was the lack of willingness of a particular department to provide obligatory material for the entrance examination in an accessible format. Whilst the Theory examination was arranged without problems, and my current department provided all music that was sent to applicants shortly before the examinations in my requested XML-format (which can be produced in commonly used music notation programmes such as Sibelius, Finale etc.) the primary department to which I applied did not acknowledge my original request for the one piece sent in advance to be given in an alternative format. When the piece was sent to all applicants as a scanned PDF, I received a message saying that it had not been possible to provide any alternative.

5.3 CHALLENGING STUDY AREAS FOR SEVERELY VISUALLY IMPAIRED MUSIC STUDENTS

There are some music based subjects which, due to their visual nature are bound to be of greater difficulty to severely visually impaired students. Three such subjects or areas were drawn to my attention in the interviews and also correlate with my own experiences. The first of these areas concerned the teaching and learning of vocal and instrumental technique. A lot of music teachers show technique visually and sighted musicians also learn from looking in mirrors and watching others. None of this is possible for the severely visually impaired student.

Christopher's clarinet teacher is not a native English speaker and this caused some problems at the beginning, as he found it hard to convey concepts verbally. However there co-operation improved quickly and both his clarinet and organ teachers are willing to allow the necessary and appropriate physical contact to convey technical aspects of playing. Due to not being able to watch others and check ones own technique in mirrors, teachers often have to repeat things to the visually impaired student. Christopher praised his own teacher's willingness but added:

I think it's good that I play the instrument that I do. Because I know we have other faculties that are... I probably should say impatient but ... who wouldn't spend as much time with me and be as relaxed. (Christopher).

Claire was also complementary of her singing teacher who took time and let her touch her and repeated things. However, some movements that affect the voice are minimal and she reflected:

Also I wasn't always getting some of the vocal technique. She'd try and convey something to me and I'd try it and then not be able to do it and she'd say: "No, you did it... that wasn't right." I didn't know how it wasn't right or I'd think it was right and it wasn't and it was because of some visual thing I just didn't get. (Claire).

All of the participants commented that it took teachers time to find the best way of conveying technique and that it was often a process of trial and error. A problem that I personally have experienced, is that some teachers are uncomfortable with physical contact. This seems to be particularly the case for male teachers who have taught me. This is in its own way understandable, but a teacher's responsibility is to teach and therefore they must be willing to, at least, discuss how the problem can be solved.

A subject that is unavoidably visually-based is conducting. Christopher has to study conducting as part of his course. He is very interested in learning but experienced problems. Most sighted musicians have played in conducted ensembles or sung in choirs throughout their childhood and therefore naturally understand the basics of what to do. His institution produced all the material that he needed for his course but he did not receive any other official accommodations for Conducting. At the beginning of the course, he could not imagine how small movements could affect the singers:

My high school band director had taught me some basics of conducting. So I kind of knew the shapes of the patterns but I never realised until I conducted my first piece in front of the class last semester, how sensitive they are to the slightest thing. I was like: "There's no way they'll see this!" when I change my pattern and then all of a sudden they were performing with a totally different sound and that was just really weird to me. (Christopher).

He continued that his teacher had given feedback but only had one way of explaining things. Christopher was reliant on his peers and other teachers to be able to improve and he could, of course, not learn from how the other students were conducting. Another problem he faced was how to learn the scores off by heart:

First of all, just the process of memorising all of the metre changes and conducting patterns was hard. [...] I was focused on "What is this measure!" I wasn't doing hardly any dynamics and not giving any of the cues, you know. [...]so just finding out a process for memorising the score was tough at first. You know, I had to decide what

was important. What do I need to know? What's the most important thing for me to show as a conductor? (Christopher).

Although Christopher said that he would like to do the advanced conducting course, he was worried that he would not be able to keep up with the pace of a new score every day and thought that taking private lessons may be the better course of action.

My personal experience of conducting is much the same. There is a great reliance on watching and observing others. The memorisation of the material in the extremely detailed way required for conducting was also very time consuming. I did receive some extra lessons from a student doing Conducting Pedagogy but these concentrated mainly on somehow getting me through the examination.

The last particularly problematic area of study which was brought to my attention was linked to visual expression. Visual expression seems to be something rated particularly highly by singers and affects both vocal tuition and, of course, subjects such as drama. The teacher Claire had as a teenager had expressed her views directly to Claire, when she had talked of her wish to go into music theatre:

She'd say things like: "You can't do that. You can't do music theatre because you're blind and you'd fall over the stuff and it'd be dangerous. Really what you should be doing is teaching in a blind school."... She said my face was wooden. She said I didn't look as though I meant anything I was singing. No, she didn't explain what she meant. She just said that the face was really important. How would I ever be able to communicate something if my face was wooden like that. (Claire).

This affected Claire later as well. She was happy with her singing teacher at music college but returned to expression,

I suppose the only issue that I had with her that she wanted all the expression to come from the face. Because of my previous history I really struggled with that and therefore I felt when I was doing my classical singing I was a bit like a prisoner in my own body I'd just stand there and feel completely wooden and not be able to emote at all. When I

play the piano and sing because I don't have to worry about that I can be completely emotive and able to play and sing and express myself completely freely. I am able to use my face at the piano because I feel that sense of confidence whereas when I was just standing there I felt completely bare and I didn't know anything about the conventions of what a sighted singer would do. (Claire).

The positive side of Claire's experience was that her teacher at music college was open, told her exactly what she meant and tried to show her. The music college also set up special movement classes for visually impaired students. Although Claire was the first visually impaired person to study there, a couple of other students began before she graduated. The negative side was that she was not accommodated in drama lessons:

There were quite a lot of visual elements to it. So sometimes it was good but sometimes it was a bit... It was hit and miss really. And the teachers wouldn't always know or have been prepared for the fact that there was a visually impaired person there. (Claire).

Drama lessons would have been very important for Claire and if done in an accessible way, they could have freed her from the feeling of 'imprisonment in her own body' and given her valuable information about conventions followed in expression. Visual expression and movement became something that limited Claire and reduced her self-confidence:

Certain things I did do, but I never did the really big performances. I didn't put myself forward for the competitions because I felt that I was at a disadvantage because of the movement. I should have put myself forward for Improvisation but I thought then that everyone else was moving and doing things... I think I was just worried and I let my worries determine what I did and didn't do. Whereas I know now through my own experiences that I would have been able to do a lot more things than I did. (Claire).

Claire also brought up the fact, that music colleges expect a certain level of visual expression even at the entrance examination and that many visually impaired singers aren't at that level. This is logical as many singers copy others and can learn from watching others and

themselves. This is impossible for the severely visually impaired person and it seems to be something that is difficult to teach in a non-visual way. My own experience is that some teachers are also unwilling to breach the topic as they believe it to be hurtful. It is however essential to talk about visual expression to a severely visually impaired performer as it is not something they can observe or control themselves but is seemingly an indispensable part of even non-theatrical singing. It could also, however, be worth considering what aspects of visual expression are truly necessary and which are only upheld as part of an ablest culture.

5.4. OTHER ISSUES OF ACCESSIBILITY

During the interviews some topics came up that are related to accessibility for severely visually impaired students. There were some problems relating to the accessibility of course planning information and Internet-based services. Olavi was unable to book classrooms through the official booking system and could not access information on what courses he should study when. Christopher could not upload files to the electronic portfolio system and this was obligatory for almost all courses. Despite complaints these problems had not been addressed. I have experienced similar problems with reservation systems and forms related to by studies. Recently my complaint about forms available through Artsi (the Intranet of the University of the Arts Helsinki) was passed onto the developer whose reaction was that it would be too difficult to make the required changes. This shows once again that society is not willing to make itself accessible and produces inaccessible services that could, if they were developed properly from the start, be accessible to all.

Claire and Olavi both commented on the amount of information appearing only on the physical noticeboard, including examination times, which could easily be sent by e-mail. Another area included the chaotic nature of practice-rooms and band-rooms where things were left all over the place without a thought for the next person coming. A point I wish to make from my experience, is that simple anticipatory measures seem rarely to be taken. The reservation lamps on classrooms are often very high, so difficult to see with limited vision and there is no tactile way of knowing. The locking systems should also be considered carefully. Whilst a simple electronic tag is enough at the Sibelius-Academy, the University of

applied sciences change their system shortly before my graduation meaning that an extra code was necessary at the weekends. The pad was so sensitive, that it was impossible to enter a code without being able to see the keys.

5.5 KNOWLEDGE OF DISABILITY SUPPORT

As the three participants in this study are from three different countries, the legislation governing disability in higher education was different for each. However some interesting information came to light. Christopher was very aware of his rights according to the Americans with Disabilities Act and his university had complied with this legislation. There is Disability Services which supports him, he has an official plan for accommodations, the university has money put aside in their budget to support disabled students and funds have been used to purchase software to provide Christopher with materials in braille. He knows to whom he should turn in the case of problems arising.

Claire's situation was interesting because she studied at a time of transition before her college of music was fully part of the university system, therefore it was not completely covered by legislation on accommodations. She is, however, aware that this has changed and that she would, now, at least theoretically receive support in many of the areas where she had problems. She also pointed out that there had been other severely visually impaired students, who had studied at the same college after her and that this would probably have helped the staff be more aware. At the time, however, she had no one person to whom she could turn. She was, however, provided with certain accommodations and could get readers and equipment paid for. The accommodations seem, however, to have been personal and reactive not anticipatory and therefore general.

Olavi was unaware of any policy his institution had on equality or discrimination and did not know who would be responsible for such matters. The health and social insurance body (KELA) refused to provide him with assistive equipment as he had received some at the beginning of his further education course. His institution of higher education seems not to have provided any official accommodations such as the provision of materials or extra

lessons. This seems to be the result of a lack of legislation that compels institutions of higher education to make accommodations for students with impairments.

5.6 PARTICIPANT SUGGESTIONS

Although many of the experiences of my interviewees were positive, both Claire and Christopher had advice and suggestions to help future students. Claire felt that due to the extra responsibilities and pressure put on severely visually impaired students of music, that it may be easier if the student were slightly older. This could be very difficult however in some countries, where there are strict views on the acceptable ages for admission. Christopher emphasised, that he felt he had greatly benefitted from the small size of his institution

I think it's really helped me that it's a small campus.. It is literally a really small school.[...] I really think for any visually... for any student with a disability really, I feel like a small school is easier to manage. It's easier to get the focus and attention that you need in a lot of ways. (Christopher).

Claire also suggested the setting up of an official peer advice group for visually impaired students in higher music education,

I really think peer supporting is really important. There's so much I'd be able to tell a new blind person. (Claire).

6. DISCUSSION

This study is small-scale and therefore generalisations must be made with great care. Nevertheless as the population of severely visually impaired students in higher music education world-wide is small and the areas of concern that have come to light are supported by research on students with impairments in other areas of higher education the results can be seen to give valuable information applicable to many severely visually impaired students in higher music education. The findings of this study might have been slightly different if, for example, there had been a participant who needed clear, large-print music but I could not find such a person. All of the participants in this study have either successfully graduated from or are progressing successfully in their studies of music. Experiences have been mixed. Although the positive seems generally to outweigh the negative it seems clear that a severely visually impaired student needs a certain amount of stubbornness to overcome obstacles discussed in this study, which are not faced by their fully-sighted peers. There are aspects that institutions of higher education should take into account in their policy-making and implementation to support severely visually impaired students and to give them the fullest benefits of their studies.

6.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Policies are affected by legislation and this is different in all countries. Strict disability legislation as in the USA seems to have benefitted students with an impairment most. As the social model of disability puts the emphasis for a need to change onto society, institutions of higher education need to develop policies to prevent disabling practices and make studying possible for all.

One of the themes which clearly emerges in this study is the importance of the availability of materials, particularly music in accessible formats. The contrasting experiences of Christopher and Claire show this best. Christopher receives all materials from his institution whilst Claire was getting nothing other than that which teachers were recording for her. This

was a constant drain on her resources and prevented her from full participation. Olavi could also not get recommended books for theory and I have had to produce all my own materials which takes time and energy and is limiting. Nowadays technology enables the normal print music reader to produce braille music without knowledge of the latter. In Finland institutions of higher education are not obliged to produce materials for disabled students. The Celia library, however, only has to produce obligatory course books and is unwilling to produce braille music even as part of such. Students of music need a lot of materials and few of them are legally seen obligatory. Therefore it should be considered, whether institutions of higher education should not be made responsible for the production of such materials.

Whilst participants reported many teachers who used their own time to help and support the severely visually impaired student, this was not something officially supported by the institutions. This makes it uncertain, whether a student will get the help required. There were also examples of teachers unwilling or unable to help and all participants reported that at least some time was lost whilst teachers attempted to find the best way of teaching a student whose needs differed from the norm. Therefore an increased amount of staff training on disability issues seems necessary. This should be regular and not just a reaction to a new student with an impairment as teachers must be aware and open even at the entrance examination stage. It should also be considered what aspects should be taken into account when assessing a severely visually impaired student in entrance examinations. I am not saying that students with impairments should be treated differently – the criteria should, within reason, be the same. However there may be certain aspects that should be considered. One that transpires from this study, is whether a severely visually impaired singer should be expected to have the same grasp of visual expression as their sighted peers at entrance to higher education. A lack of visual expressivity should not necessarily be assumed to mean that the person in question is incapable of it. Can a singer who has never heard or been taught Russian pronounce it? Although the languages chosen for an examination should be ones that the singer can pronounce, the severely visually impaired student does not have the possibility to learn all the aspects of visual expression that the sighted singer has learned subconsciously during his/her childhood.

Another area policies should cover is that teachers should be supported and extra lessons considered when the severely visually impaired student needs the teacher's assistance or much more time is needed to develop ways of teaching. Certain subjects can be particularly difficult for the visually impaired student. There should be policies in place for what accommodations can be made for example, if the amount of repertoire can be reduced or if some group lessons can be replaced with private lessons if group lessons prove difficult due to their visual nature.

Teachers need to be aware of the needs of their students. This requires a certain amount of organisation. As a visually impaired student cannot sight-read the necessary material must be provided in advance and teachers need to have thought through and if necessary discussed how things can be done with the student. This is partly a question of awareness and staff training but also support and implementation. Students with impairments must know to whom they should turn if things are not working out as they should. There needs to be someone responsible for their needs and equal opportunities. This seems to be lacking in Finnish legislation and institutional policies.

Finally the needs of visually impaired students need to be taken into account when I.T. services are planned. Technology should be a great help to the visually impaired in getting information but too often the platforms are inaccessible or information is put on them in inaccessible formats. This is unnecessary and should be taken seriously. Other issues of accessibility should automatically be considered when any decisions are made.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has looked at the experiences of severely visually impaired students in higher music education. There has been an increased emphasis in the last few decades in higher education in general on including minority groups and legislation has been improved in many countries. However the number of severely visually impaired students in higher music education is small.

The first aim of this research was, therefore, to bring the positive and negative experiences of severely visually impaired students of music to the attention of institutions of higher music education in the hope of changing policies. The second aim was to make severely visually impaired students aware of potential problems but above all to show them their rights and encourage them to work to improve conditions for themselves and future students.

7.1 LESSONS FROM STUDENT EXPERIENCES FOR POLICY-MAKING

As earlier research on the experiences of disabled students in higher education predicted, students had both positive and negative experiences. Participants reported that their peers were mostly open and helpful despite possible uncertainty at the beginning. All of the interviewees reported that most members of staff were supportive and sacrificed their own free time to help the severely visually impaired students when problems occurred. However this was not universal. Some members of staff had negative expectations or were unwilling or unable to support the student in question. Often staff need time to adjust to the needs of a severely visually impaired student and the adjustment occurs with varying success. This points to the need for more staff awareness and support.

Negative experiences were also caused by a lot of time having to be spent overcoming problems caused by inaccessible materials, I.T. services and problems due to having to learn all repertoire of by heart. The lack of braille music tuition in the participants' childhood years

compounded these problems further. Music specific topics, which caused particular difficulties, were technique, visual expression and conducting.

An institution of higher education needs someone who is responsible for students with impairments, who can support both the student and the staff working with them. There needs to be thought given to how institutions could assist in the production of materials, how highly visual subjects can be made more accessible and how adjustments could be made on an official level. Questions of accessibility should be part of everyday decision making and anticipatory rather than being the reaction to problems that occur.

Disability awareness is necessary for both staff and students. To be able to gain full equality those who are disadvantaged by society must be aware of their rights and need to show the way to emancipation to their 'oppressors' (Freire, 2005, pp. 43-45). Within higher music education this means that students with impairments must have the opportunity to state their needs and bring inappropriate practices to the attention of staff and peers. Therefore disability awareness and policy making linked to equality and the support of students with disabilities must include those with impairments. There also needs to be increased emphasis on the actual implementation of policies – policies and awareness are worthless if they are not used in practice and if people do not accept that the responsibility for making an accessible society lies on all of us.

7.2 AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has suggested future avenues for fruitful research. The first of these is how severely visually impaired children could be given better opportunities to learn braille music and become proficient in its usage before higher education. This is not simple particularly as more and more children are integrated.

Secondly there needs to be research into how to convey and teach aspects of visual expression to those who cannot see it and possibly have never experienced it. How important is the use of the face and body in expression – what aspects can be replaced in different ways, which aspects are completely necessary and how can teachers convey these.

What can the sighted audience learn by watching and listening to the performer who does not know the conventions? Can a culture, which consciously or subconsciously fears the unknown or 'abnormal' be positively changed by performers who differ?

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Appendix 1: Information Letter

Name of research – the Experiences of Severely Visually Impaired Students in Higher Music Education.

I am carrying out this research as part of my Masters' degree at the University of the Arts, Sibelius-Academy Helsinki, Finland. The goal of this research is to acquire a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the experiences of severely visually impaired people studying music in higher Education whereby a particular emphasis is on questions of pedagogical importance.

I am collecting the data through interviews which will be carried out via Facetime, Skype or face-to-face depending on the whereabouts of the interviewee. Times for the interviews will be decided upon at the interviewees' convenience between 15th December 2016 and 10th January 2017. Each interviewee will be interviewed twice for about thirty minutes. The first interview concerns the interviewee's background and musical education prior to higher education. The second interview, which can, if necessary, be conducted on the same day, concerns the experiences of the interviewee during higher education in music. Both interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Neither the recorded interview nor the transcription will be heard or read by anyone except the researcher herself and in case of a need for clarification, by her supervisor, Dr. Alexis Kallio (see contact details at the end of this letter). All recordings and transcriptions will be deleted permanently after the completion of this research project.

All interviewees will be given pseudonyms and I will not name the institutions of education mentioned in the interviews, as naming them may compromise the anonymity of the research subjects.

Interviewees have the right to pull out of the research at any point before, during or after the interviews up to the date of hand-in. I will provide the interviewees with the transcriptions of their personal interviews and they will have the right to comment on anything that may come to their attention. I shall also provide the interviewees with the

chance to read through the research report and discuss any issues concerning their own contributions to it.

Interviewees are not given compensation for participating in this study. I hope, however, that they will participate to increase understanding and knowledge and thereby to improve conditions and opportunities for future musicians with a visual impairment.

The interviews should not cause any risks to those involved. If interviewees feel unsettled by topics of conversation they may, as stated above, withdraw or refuse to answer questions. I am also prepared to discuss difficult issues with interviewees outside of the interviews as a peer. If an interviewee is concerned about anything to do with the research or how it has been carried out, (s)he may contact the researcher personally or her supervisor.

Each interviewee is obliged to return the consent form, which for reasons of accessibility will be sent and filled in by e-mail. I will also repeat the rights of the research subjects at the beginning of their first interview and ask for their renewed consent.

Contact Details:

Researcher: Natalie Ball

Email: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Telephone (iPhone): XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Supervisor – Dr. Alexis Kallio

Email: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Telephone: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix 2: Consent Form

To consent to your participation in this study, reply to this e-mail by pasting in the following text and filling in your full name and date of consent.

The Experiences of Severely Visually Impaired Students in Higher Music Education

Researcher: Natalie Jaana Minerva Ball

University of the Arts, Sibelius-Academy, Helsinki, Finland.

Data collection is done by interviews which will be recorded.

I, [First name, (middle names), surname), wish to participate in this study. I have read and understood the study information sheet given to me and I have sufficient information on the process of the study. I understand that my participation in the study is completely voluntary and that I have the right to discontinue my participation at any stage without any consequences. It has been explained to me that a designated researcher will, at my request, provide me with additional details of the general principles of the study and its progress or of the results concerning myself.

I have understood that the material and research data is gathered for scientific purposes only and it will not be given even in part to the study subject him/herself.

The research results related to me are only available to the researchers of the research group and they will not be presented to a third party without my written consent. The researcher in charge of the study may, however, give permission to her supervisor to analyse my research results for scientific purposes. Any type of commercial exploitation of the results is prohibited.