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Music Schools – In Search of Equity

Introduction

In this Symposium, my contribution explores the historical narratives of Finnish “out of school” music education, specifically, the basic arts education in music provided by music schools, from a legal-philosophical perspective. Despite Finland’s small population of approximately 5.6 million inhabitants (Statistics Finland 2024), the nation has produced a significant number of globally renowned musicians. This achievement is attributed to the country’s systematic “out of school” music education, which is supported by government funding. I will delve into the primary mechanisms employed by the state to support music education provided by music schools, tracing back to the late 1960s when the first Act (147/68) on state support for music schools was enacted, up to the present day.

Historical interpretation often employs themes or thematization. In the context of Finnish education history, these themes encompass nationalism, welfare state and neoliberalism (Vehkalahti 2015). These themes could also delineate the phases of Finnish music schools’ history. Although Jean Sibelius was not a music educator himself, his music has been extensively taught in music schools, general music education, and universities, such as the Sibelius Academy, originally the Helsinki Music Institute (*Helsingin Musiikkiopisto*), established in 1882 (Pajamo 2007, 18). His music has been intimately linked with national identity (Heimonen & Hebert 2012, 163). Other potential themes include the tension between individual rights and the common good; encapsulating (neo) liberalism that underscores individual rights and the welfare state ideology that strives to promote the common good. Furthermore, one theme could be the various roles of the state, a focal point in regulation theories. Neoliberalism, prevalent in some Anglo-American societies, for instance, favors a minimalist role of the state – a “night guard” that solely protects its citizens’ lives (Nozick 1974). In contrast, the state’s role in the Nordic welfare states may be perceived as paternalistic, protective, and even directive of its citizens’ lives (Heimonen 2002, 137). Additionally, the history of education could be examined through the lens of regulation timing: Education can be regulated either in advance, preceding educational activities, or *post facto*. For instance, until 1992, the Finnish National Board of Education’s state authorities inspected textbooks before teachers were allowed to use them, whereas ranking schools based on educational outcomes has been typical in Anglo-American societies.

In this presentation on Finnish music schools offering “out of school” music education, also referred to as extra-curricular music education (Heimonen 2002, 19, 26), now part of basic education in the arts, I employ all the aforementioned themes as lenses in my interpretation of how music schools have strived to implement and actualize the educational principles of equality, and particularly equity, grounded in the Constitution of Finland (§ 16), across different historical periods from the late 1960s to the present.

Constructing a Framework for Music Schools

In Finland, the establishment of a welfare state primarily transpired in the aftermath of World War II. This period witnessed the country’s reconstruction and the widespread distribution of services such as health care, education and the arts (Heimonen & Hebert 2012, 163). The Finnish state has

played an active role in fostering conditions conducive to the well-being of its citizens, with education being considered a significant component of social politics (Vehkalahti 2015).

During the 1960s and 70s, a comprehensive overhaul of the education system was perceived as a crucial element in the construction of the Finnish welfare state (Vehkalahti 2015). The principle of educational equality, enshrined in the Constitution of Finland (§16), was interpreted as providing identical study opportunities for all children and youth, irrespective of their economic or regional background. This principle of equality also influenced music education, necessitating the equalization of social and regional disparities (Heimonen 2005, 122).

This led to two major reforms in Finnish education. Firstly, the introduction of the first national curriculum for basic education in 1970, which comprised two parts: 1) the core curriculum, and 2) the curricula, totaling 700 pages, and introduced a nine-year comprehensive school curriculum for all pupils. Secondly, two years prior to that, in 1968, the first Act (147/68) governing state support for music schools (i.e. out-of-school music education) was enacted.

The first special Act for the music schools (147/68) came into force in the beginning of 1969. Despite its compact nature, the Act conferred a considerable degree of interpretative freedom to authorities tasked with its application. This latitude was perceived as daunting due to the potential of ensuing disagreements, given the substantial discretionary power vested in state authorities and those implementing the regulations (Heimonen 2005, 10).

The initial Act was subject to criticism for a multitude of reasons (Kuha 2017, 612). For instance, it was projected that the Act would govern merely a fraction, potentially only a quarter, of all music schools. Consequently, the principle of regional equality could not be actualized. The Ministry of Finance allocated a mere 1.3 million marks (the currency at the time) for music schools, despite their annual costs being estimated at 5.5 million marks.

Furthermore, early childhood music education was completely neglected, and achieving equal pay and teaching responsibilities compared to the Sibelius Academy staff was not accomplished. Critics articulated their concerns regarding the issues of the first Act under the title “Unmusical legislation” (Heimonen 2005, 10).

The emphasis on long-term planning and committees was a defining characteristic of the cultural and educational politics of the 1970s in Finland (Vehkalahti 2015). Consequently, the Ministry of Education commissioned a committee to scrutinize the issues associated with the first Act. A memorandum was drafted in 1974 with the objective of addressing the challenges faced by music schools and formulating a proposal for a comprehensive national arrangement of music education across the country. The memorandum identified the primary obstacles to the development of music schools as organizational and financial, rather than pertaining to the content and objectives of music education (Heimonen 2005, 10–11).

In 1977, a comprehensive revision of the Decree associated with the first Act (147/68) was undertaken. The new Decree (486/77) instituted a tripartite division of music education into 1) music schools, 2) music institutes, and 3) conservatories, and it delineated the responsibilities of these distinct forms of music schools. Music schools and music institutes primarily catered to school-aged children and youth, while conservatories also provided professional music studies (Dahlström 1982, 281). Furthermore, in accordance with the new legislation, these institutions developed their own curricula. The amalgamation of the new Decree (486/77) and the curricula was quite stringent, leading to criticism for “over-organization” and “officious meticulousness,” traits

considered atypical for arts education. Nevertheless, the Association of Music Schools endorsed the revised stringent legislation, arguing that “laws are not enacted according to exceptional cases,” and that “the new system is safe” as it “minimizes arbitrariness” engendered by “unlimited freedom,” and “indefinite and loose regulations” (Heimonen 2005, 11).

In addition to the three types of music institutions, the Sibelius Academy provided education for particularly gifted young music students in its junior department. Two divergent perspectives emerged: one advocating for the continuation and preservation of the Sibelius Academy’s junior teaching, and the other, represented by the Association of Music Schools, arguing for the provision of education for young people exclusively in music schools, music institutes, and conservatories (Dahlström 1982, 281–282).

Violin professor Tuomas Haapanen, a critical thinker, opposed the imposition of rigid formulas on music teaching (Dahlström 1982, 282). He articulated one of the fundamental challenges in regulating arts education: “Music schools must have clear regulations and an accurately drafted curriculum.” However, “they could be ... drafted in a way that leaves sufficient living space for essential contents of music education” (Haapanen 1980, 14–15).

This quotation from the violin professor encapsulates the complex dimensions inherent in the regulation of arts education or other artistic activities. The state plays a positive role in creating conditions and circumstances conducive to music and arts education, a concept referred to as positive freedom and viewed as a fundamental duty of welfare states. Instrumentalism, which perceives regulation as an instrument of the state to achieve or promote objectives, is closely linked to positive freedom. For instance, the number of established music schools saw a significant increase in the 1970s following the enactment of the special Act for music schools (Heimonen 2005).

However, instrumentalism has also been subject to criticism, as individuals may become instruments themselves if the system or organization takes precedence over the aims and lives of human beings. State interventions may foster activities but simultaneously restrict freedom by controlling the content of education. As Tuomas Haapanen argued, activities, such as music education, which are supported by state regulations, require freedom to nurture their essential contents. In other words, the needs of arts educators or music students should be prioritized over the system or organization itself. In summary, the tensions between individual needs and the common good, emphasized in instrumentalism, must be balanced (Heimonen 2005, 74).

The 1980s and 1990s: Transitioning towards Basic Arts Education in Music

In the 1980s, legislation governing music schools underwent another revision. A new Act (402/87), accompanied by a fresh Decree on state support for music schools, was implemented on August 1, 1987. The most notable changes were the distinctions made between curricula, institutional administration, and qualification requirements. However, separate curricula for music schools, music institutes, and conservatories, as stipulated in the 1977 Decree, remained intact. The curricula, based on the new Act (402/87), were enforced at the beginning of August 1988 and incorporated early childhood music education (Heimonen 2005, 12). Critics of this revision highlighted that the conception of music remained narrow, and the execution of music studies continued to follow a rigid, pipeline-like structure, as had been the case previously (Vapaavuori 1989, 22). During this period, state-supported music schools primarily offered education in classical music, excluding other genres, and the examination requirements set forth by the Association of Music Schools were strictly interpreted and applied in practice.

The 1980s witnessed a general reduction in the regulation governing education, while individual choice and market presence in society increased (Vehkalahti 2015). An overarching reform of the organization of state aid was implemented in 1993, with the objective of delegating power to local municipalities and institutions by diminishing state control and augmenting local decision-making. Alongside these changes, the system of state aid underwent a transformation (Heimonen 2005, 12–13).

The special Act for music schools of 1995 (516/95) was enacted within a more international context compared to its predecessors. One of its aims was to foster flexibility, leading to the abandonment of the three-phased division (music school, music institute, conservatory). Local curricula were fortified and collaboration with other arts was encouraged. Music schools were granted permission to create their own curricula based on the National Core Curriculum of the National Board of Education. The role of the music school expanded beyond traditional teaching to encompass the general development of music culture. The Education and Culture Committee of the Parliament even made statements regarding the contents of education, emphasizing the joy of making music and dancing, life-long learning, and the importance of a positive learning environment. Simultaneously, it was proposed that a novel regulatory instrument should be developed for music schools – an instrument capable of assessing the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and effectiveness of longer-term results of music education provided by music schools. In essence, results management was being introduced into these music schools (Heimonen 2005, 143–44).

In the 1990s, Finland witnessed a comprehensive reform in school legislation, which proposed the repeal of the special Act for music schools of 1995. This proposal elicited critical responses from the music school sector: the most compelling argument in defense of the special legislation for music schools was financial. In Finland, law is typically perceived as a secure mechanism for state financial support, and a special Act for music schools was regarded as safe. The importance of high-quality education, educational equality, and even the moral function of law was underlined (Heimonen 2005, 144–48).

In conclusion, the special Act of 1995 for music schools was repealed, and music schools came under the governance of the Act on basic arts education of 1998, which remains in force, albeit likely to be renewed soon. This Act regulates various forms of arts education, not solely music. Education aimed at cultivating future professionals is briefly mentioned as an objective, but it is not emphasized as it had been previously. A new paragraph on evaluation (§ 7) distinguishes this Act from the former special Acts on music schools. Furthermore, the Act facilitates two types of syllabi for music in basic arts education as per the National Core Curriculum (FNAE 2018; TPOPS 2002, 2005; 2017 a & b) – general or advanced. The advanced syllabus (TPOPS 2002) was equivalent to the curriculum for music based on the special Act for music schools, and it ensured state financial aid and qualification requirements of teachers as before (Heimonen 2005, 148–49).

Music Schools in the 21st Century: Balancing Equity and Individuality

Education, inclusive of music education, has undergone several revisions in the 21st century, primarily through the implementation of core curricula, even though the Act governing basic arts education of 1998 remains in effect. A relatively novel concept in music education, equity, has been introduced alongside the principle of equality. Notably, equity is interpreted to accommodate individual needs and permits special support based on these needs, thereby promoting everyone's ability and right to study music (Heimonen 2023).

The National Core Curriculum continues to offer two syllabi for music (FNAE 2018; TPOPS 2017a & b): the general and the advanced. Education provided according to the latter receives significantly more state funding than the former, sparking discussions on the *de facto* principles of equality and equity (Heimonen 2023). Consequently, researchers (Väkevä, Westerlund & Ilmola-Sheppard 2017) have designed new, more flexible systems to enhance social justice in Finnish basic arts education in music.

However, the question of whether to regulate, and if so, how to regulate – by legal or financial instruments – remains pertinent. A flexible system allows for local decision-making regarding the contents of education and considers individual needs and objectives in education. Conversely, a system predicated on law and national core curricula is typically safer and promotes everyone's rights, economic and regional equality, and equity as well.

Heidi Elmgren's (2023) study examines the reception of the current core curriculum for basic arts education in music, as developed by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Her findings underline the complexities inherent in implementing reforms. The data comprises statements on drafts of the core curriculum from stakeholders, including Finnish arts institutions, arts education institutions, organizers of basic education in the arts (BEA) such as municipalities, and professional organizations of arts and education.

Four themes emerged from the data analysis:

- 1) Music schools are perceived as preparatory education for professional music training.
- 2) The growing autonomy of individual music schools is met with criticism.
- 3) Concerns arise over the comparability and potential loss of common standards in basic arts education.
- 4) Stakeholders express preferences for the contents of basic arts education.

Elmgren (2023) highlights the significance of the modifications suggested by the newly introduced core curriculum, as recognized by the stakeholders. However, she also emphasizes the apprehension surrounding the flexibility it brings, which is seen as potentially undermining the conventional instructional content deemed essential for music pedagogy.

The music school sector is grappling with a multitude of challenges. Elmgren's analysis reveals a certain reluctance among some stakeholders to reorient their views and comprehension of music pedagogy. Rather than embracing change and looking forward, they seem to be seeking answers in historical practices to propel the progress in music education. This tendency to revert to the past indicates a resistance to change, which could potentially hinder the evolution of music education.

Concluding Remarks

Why does history, often, seem to repeat itself? According to Elmgren (2023), the same challenges that plagued music school education in the 1970s seem to be still relevant today. During that era, some state authorities favored stringent regulations that left little space for interpretation. However, according to theories of regulation, the enactment of additional regulations only amplifies the demand for an even greater number of regulations. The stricter the regulations, the stricter the subsequent regulations required. There is no terminus if one attempts to eliminate interpretative space.

Indeed, Finland has been characterized by *a deluge of norms* – perhaps attributable to its relatively brief history as an independent state. Initially, Finland was a part of Sweden until 1809, then of Russia until it gained independence in 1917 (Heimonen & Hebert 2012, 158). The Finns have traditionally placed their trust in the law and regulations, and they are accustomed to compliance. The law has been – and continues to be – viewed as a foundation for independence, the welfare state, culture, and education, while freedom is perceived (at least to some extent) as perilous.

This tension and the quest for a balance between freedom – usually referring to individual rights and pupil-centered education that focuses on individual aims and needs – and the common good, the rights of institutions to educate future professionals to serve the music life of society, appears to be an enduring issue. It is connected to neoliberalism, freedom from state support, the rules and regulations of state authorities, the market usurping the role of the state, and the welfare state ideology, which advocates a more paternalistic role of the state in (music) education. Currently, pedagogical research and development projects (López-Íñiguez, n.d.) in instrumental pedagogy and the education of ‘gifted’ and highly motivated children focus on the politics of care, the joy of learning, and the individual goals of students. These elements are regarded as essential and fundamental in the education of all music students.

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