

THE CONSERVATOIRE AND THE SOCIETY

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“I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform” (Dewey, 1897).

“Educational transformations are always the result and the symptom of the social transformation in terms of which they are to be explained” (Durkheim, 1956/2007).

“Education is a site of struggle and compromise. It serves as a proxy as well as for larger battles over what our institutions should do, whom they should serve, and who should make these decisions. And, yet, by itself it is one of the major arenas in which resources, power, and ideology specific to policy, finance, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation in education are worked through. Thus, education is both cause and effect, determining and determined” (Apple, 2007).

In this presentation, I suggest that

- conservatoires contribute in shaping society,
- “delivering” what is “ordered” is limiting our self-understanding,
- we must separate between conservatoires’ assignment, contributions and responsibility, and
- we must separate between conservatoires’ intentions and functions.

From time to time, I get the impression that we regard insights from the sociology and philosophy of education, such as the ones of Michael Apple, John Dewey, and Emile Durkheim, as not being valid for conservatoires. I suggest that this is not so. On the contrary, conservatoires, just like any other educational institutions, contribute in maintaining the existing as well as shaping the future society.

Some will hold that conservatoires *do* pay attention to the needs of society. And, of course, there are several ways of comprehending the role of conservatoires with respect to the social impact of making music. Eagerly adapting to the widespread New Public Management discourse on higher education, which has obtained hegemony in the ways we describe ourselves, we pay much attention to the business and industry language, describing how conservatoires “deliver” their “products” according to what the authorities “order” from us on behalf of society. In this paper, I call this the social *assignment* of the conservatoires. Entailed are concepts such as ‘accountability’, ‘employability’, generic competences, and (not very well defined) ‘relevance’, and ‘quality’.

I hold that solely focusing on “delivering” what is “ordered” limit conservatoires’ self-understanding as institutions of education in society. So do also concepts such as employability, generic competences and relevance, unless they are being recontextualised (Johansen, 2016). In order to see ourselves in society more clearly, we need to separate between *assignment*, *contributions*, and *responsibility*, as well as between an *intentional* and *functional* perspective on what we do.

Conservatoires’ social *contributions* may not be restricted to what we think society “orders” from us. That is because the values and social impact of music making are not always congruent with Neoliberal notions of a well-functioning educational system or quality by measures. In addition, our social contributions cannot be studied solely by attending to how we experience them. We also need to know how conservatoires actually *function* in society – which is not necessarily the same.

Still, differentiating between assignments and contributions does not give the whole picture. We also need to discuss conservatoires’ social *responsibility*, a moral obligation to critically inspect and actively contribute to changing society. Do our adaptations to the Neoliberal discourse hamper critical analysis of our contributions, functions and responsibilities?

I suggest that our social responsibility includes promoting values that we, by virtue of *being* conservatoires, can address more clearly than many others do. Overlapping with this, we are responsible of the general values we install in our graduates.

Macro meso micro

One question might concern how we may depict this three-perspective relationship of conservatoires' social assignment, contributions and responsibility with respect to society's macro, meso, and micro level. Macro: Does the social impact of making music affect big social issues such as global warming, warfare, and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor? Meso: Which are our alternatives to simply adapting to the prevailing discourse of the educational system we belong to and the attached educational politics? Micro: How do we shape our curricula, what do our hidden curricula look like, and what do our graduates carry with them out into society?

Let me address a few points in need of further elaborations.

The value of depth and slow processes

Does society need *efficiency* in every area? Can increased efficiency cause less artistic depth? Will it allot less time to reflect on what we are doing? Can it lead to a decrease in educational quality? Who should see, and point to that, if not artists and institutions of arts education?

Advocating the non-measurable

Striving for documenting the social effects of making music in measurable terms, should we also consider the alternative of raising the fight for the non-measurable values of music, music making and thereby the non-measurable values of higher music education? Do conservatoires have the same problem as the president of Harvard University, Drew Faust pointed to in her inauguration address in 2007, saying that “[...] measures cannot themselves capture the achievements, let alone the aspirations of universities” ?

Who could exemplify, better than us, Jeff Adams (2013, p.243) suggestion that neoliberal pedagogical processes “operates by reducing creative practices to passively reproductive activities”?

Self-criticism and 'hard' justifications

Does our social responsibility include self-criticism? When looking particularly for measurable effects, do we run the risk of missing the genuine, inherent meaning and value of music? Can we reshape these non-measurable values into what Chris Philpott names 'hard' justifications (Philpott, 2012), and not just "soft" ones?

The values we install in our graduates: Inspecting our hidden curricula

How do we contribute to our graduates' participation in the future society by our hidden curricula, such as our inside status hierarchy? Educating for community music such as music in prisons and hospitals has low status in the inside status hierarchies of conservatoires where the soloist and the orchestra musician occupy the highest levels.

Four ways of action

We might consider four ways of action. One through the students we graduate, and another by communicating our doubts within the educational system we belong to. Thirdly, through the scholarly work of the academic staff, and, fourth, we might take part in the public conversation about society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Contributing to the mosaic

Summing up, I suggest that differentiating between conservatoires' social assignment, contributions and responsibilities as seen in the perspectives of intentions and functions will contribute to a deeper understanding of the social impact of making music.

If education in large, and higher education as one of its branches, contribute in shaping the society of tomorrow, there is no exception for conservatoires. On the contrary, conservatoires should define what could be their *particular* contribution to a mosaic of small changes moving the society, little by little, towards a better future for all who live

there. It sounds infantile. But it is our responsibility to come up with some non-infantile answers.

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