Nordic Research in Music Education

Original Article | Vol. 2, No. 2, 2021, pp. 58–73 | ISSN: 2703-8041

Care as technology for exclusion

Power operating in jurors' talk about admission tests to Swedish music teacher education

Monica Lindgren, Ragnhild Sandberg-Jurström² & Olle Zandén¹

Affiliation: ¹Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Sweden; ²Ingesund School of Music, Karlstad university, Sweden Contact corresponding author: Monica.Lindgren@hsm.gu.se

Abstract

In this article, we explore and problematise admission tests to specialist music teacher education in Sweden from a governing perspective, where higher music education is considered a discursive practice. It illustrates how power operates in legitimating the tests. The study uses stimulated recall in jury members' talk about assessing applicants for music teacher education programmes, and uses Foucault's concept of governmentality to reveal entrance tests as something regarded as generally good for all. This operating discourse is built on governmental rationality and processes that make it possible to reach conclusions about the applicants' personalities and prospects for learning and developing in the future. Through care as technology of power, failing applicants are excluded from becoming music teachers and at the same time they are rescued from struggling in the future. The results are discussed in relation to issues of democratic music education, ethics and requirements for widened access to higher music education.

Keywords: admission tests, governmentality, music teacher education, subject positioning, technology of power

In Sweden, as in most countries with institutions for higher music education, an admission test is one of the gates which the applicants must be able to get through and where the institutions' jurors function as gatekeepers. Normally, applicants to music teacher programmes must meet both basic and special eligibility requirements, the latter being established by means of admission tests, including auditions. In the admission tests, both musical and pedagogical skills are evaluated and scored, sometimes completed with recommendation letters (Payne & Ward, 2020). In Sweden, admission tests to music teacher education must

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be approved by the Swedish Council for Higher Education and each institution has acquired approval for their own test design. The tests normally cover vocal and instrumental skills, including skills on the main instrument, ensemble playing, aural skills, music theory and musical leadership. Given that recruitment processes can be carried out using many different methods, research is important, not least from an ethical position (Jørgensen, 2009).

Recent studies show a lack of appropriate concepts (Olsson & Nielsen, 2018), of proper information about the audition processes (Koza, 2008), and of appropriate and transparent measurements (Payne & Ward, 2020) to use when deciding whether to admit or deny students a place in music teacher programmes. In addition, our own ongoing research (funded by the Swedish Research Council and focusing on assessment and legitimation of entrance auditions to music teacher education) has so far shown that the credibility of such assessments can be questioned. In line with Payne and Ward (2020), we have found a lack of transparency, for example, when personality is assessed in a test which is supposed to provide opportunities to demonstrate skills in playing the main instrument (Sandberg-Jurström et al., 2021b). Another problem is that jurors assessing applicants' performances have markedly different opinions regarding the minimum requirements for approval. Also, the jurors legitimate these variations with reference to the demanding education and profession, the supposed capacities of the applicants and the flexible admission conditions (Sandberg-Jurström et al., 2021a). One further important issue in our research project on entrance auditions is to uncover the power and power technologies in the governing of the tests, which is the aim of this article. In addition, and from a Foucauldian perspective, the issue of governance, through the practice of admission tests to music teacher education, will be related to the issue of access to higher music education.

Music teacher education in the Nordic countries

In the Nordic countries, a music teacher degree can be obtained at universities, teacher colleges and music academies. Instrumental skills as well as theoretical and practical teacher education are included in the specialist music teacher programmes. Such programmes are still quite popular in Sweden, and there are more applicants than places, so that prospective students have to compete for the available places. Music teacher training is offered at eight Swedish universities and teaching degrees consist of educational science, teaching practice, primary subject and secondary subject. Since 2011, the educational science area of 90 ECTS has been mandatory for all students wishing to attain a teaching degree. Primary and secondary subjects can be made up of 180–210 ECTS and correspond to school subjects. Most music teacher students have music as both their primary and secondary subject. For a graduate to teach at the upper secondary school level, a teaching degree normally consists of 270–330 ECTS.

As in nearly all OECD countries, in Sweden there is a recruitment imbalance to higher education in general, especially regarding social background as measured by the educational level of the parents. Students whose parents lack tertiary education are underrepresented, as are students who have a non-Swedish background (Kahlroth, 2019), something which in Sweden is particularly significant within arts programmes (SOU 2018:23). The government requires Swedish higher education institutions to actively promote a widened access to higher education. Even though Sweden has established some alternative entrance routes into higher education to facilitate the entrance of underrepresented groups of students, uneven recruitment patterns still persist. Research has shown that music teacher education recruits students that have a similar educational background in music. This has been named the "closed educational cycle" or the "feedback loop" (Borgström Källén, 2014, p. 314), which refers to the fact that teachers and students have been trained in the same music educational settings: "Accordingly, music teachers teach in an educational tradition that greatly likens the discourse that once educated them" (Borgström Källén, 2014, p. 314). In research, this conservative system of conformity has for decades been viewed as problematic within school music education (Borgström Källén, 2014; Zandén, 2010) as well as in music teacher education (Gullberg, 2002; Olsson, 1993). In a newly published anthology focusing on the context of higher music education in the Nordic countries (Angelo et al., 2021a), norms of quality and professionality are highlighted in several chapters. Gender inequality (Borgström Källén, 2021) and gendered norms (Jensen, 2021) as well as tensions between generalist and specialist music teacher programmes (Eidsvaag & Angelo, 2021) are some examples. In a study of dominating discourses within four higher educational institutions, Angelo et al. (2021b) discuss issues concerning "what and whose knowledge, views on music, humans, societies, learning and teaching, and values and visions are governed in higher music education, and who and what that are left out" (p. 380).

In a discussion of renewal towards a more socially adapted music teacher education, the hegemonic discourses governing the institutions and their teacher programmes become important to problematise. One important aspect is that higher music education is guided by a musico-pedagogical practice model that upholds a narrow construction of musical expertise (Laes & Westerlund, 2018), a model which derives from the hierarchical master-apprentice tradition. Nerland (2004) shows, for example, how instrument teaching within this tradition is regulated by discursive practices that restrict the students' possibilities to learn. Another example is Christophersen's (2009) study, which points at the dominance of certain aesthetical values that function as musical belief systems that restrict music conservatories. This historical tradition is hard to challenge in contemporary music teacher education since music teaching is dependent on the individual teacher's background (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Jordhus-Lier, 2018). Hence there is a need for critical examination of music teaching traditions (Ferm Thorgersen et al., 2015). Based on the conclusions in previous research, we find it important to examine the discursive

legitimation of admission tests, as they function as entrance gates to specialist music teacher education.

Power and governmentality in education

From a theoretical point of departure, teacher education can be understood as an institutionalised way of defining knowledge through power. Institutional practices are defined by power relations which mirror the dominance of certain discourses and ways of being. Higher music education is one such institution. And as in all educational institutions, power is central in higher music institutions. However, power should not be seen here in the conventional sense that those who have power control those who have not. Nor should it be considered something to be taken and given away. Foucault (1969/2002) criticised this notion of repressive power and explained that power is circulating through the practices of people in their daily lives, mirroring the dominance of certain discourses. In these relations, power produces knowledge about the world, and people take up certain subject positions in an ongoing process of "becoming", rather than "being", in the world. According to Foucault (1978/1991), power is regarded as a product of complex relationships created in collectively constructed discourses. People are seen as permeated by discourses, continuously created and recreated in specific cultural and historical settings.

Foucault elaborates on the concept of "governmentality" (Dean, 1999) in order to understand the everyday government of normality. The concept of governmentality is used to challenge organisational practices which are taken for granted. Traditionally, government is associated with the activities of political authorities such as the state and its institutions. In the governmentality approach, government refers to the activities that shape our conduct by working of interests and beliefs in the name of truth. A governmental analysis highlights how subjects are discursively constituted and shaped through particular strategies and techniques, including how they are shaping their own subjectivities through techniques of self-improvement. In this study, the concept is used in the making policy of admission tests to music teacher education.

In this study, admission tests to music teacher education are seen as a form of governing when producing principles that quality and disqualify applicants. Hence, the concepts of inclusion/exclusion become central. For Foucault, exclusion was a central concept. In his historical work *Discipline and Punish* he explored how groups of people were marginalised through different systems of exclusion in French society (Foucault, 1955/1977). However, assumptions about, and links between, governance and inclusion/exclusion must not be taken for granted. Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) explore the analytical slippage and overlap between the concepts. On the one hand, when defining the issue of social inclusion/exclusion through examining practices, attention is often directed towards representation

of categories of groups of individuals, such as race, gender or class, that were previously excluded. This is constructed as equity problematics. On the other hand, when focusing on systems of reason that are embodied in educational practices, inclusion and exclusion are viewed as concepts related to power and knowledge. We agree with Popkewitz and Lindblad on the need of paying attention to both perspectives, as well as the relations between the perspectives. In order to explore the social principles of exclusion, we have to focus on the taken-for-granted ideas, beliefs and practices in the everyday life of educational institutions.

The study

This article is part of a research project funded by the Swedish Research Council, focusing on assessment and legitimation of entrance auditions to music teacher education. The data consist of 109 video-documented entrance auditions and 34 focus group conversations/ individual conversations with jury members at music teacher education programmes in Sweden. The material was produced during the spring of 2018 at four of in total eight Swedish specialist music teacher programmes. The material was produced during the spring of 2018 and the institutions were chosen based on variation in institutional background, current organisation, teacher programme profile and musical genre. When asking jurors and applicants to participate in the study by taking part in a focus group conversation/ individual conversation, they received written information about the project and regarding de-identification, voluntary participation and consent. All applicants and jurors who gave their written consent were video recorded during the admission tests, and almost every member in the jury groups where the video recordings had been carried out, agreed to participate in the study by signing a written consent. 18 interviews had the character of focus group talks with 2-4 participants, and 16 interviews were structured as individual conversations between the researcher and the participant. Altogether, 59 jury members were interviewed. Most of the interviews were carried out within two weeks of the entrance auditions, and all were done within two months. Each conversation lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was audiotaped and transcribed. The jurors were asked to select sequences from the videos of the auditions they assessed, as stimulus to help the participants recall the auditions and talk about the quality of the applicants' performances. Finally, they were asked to reflect on entrance auditions to music teacher education in general, and this part of the discussions has been used as data in this article. All participants were well informed about the purpose of the research. Those who participated in the study signed an informed consent document describing the purpose of the research and the procedures involved in it along with contact information of the person responsible for answering questions and a statement indicating that participation was voluntary.

In using the approach of governmentality, we took our departure from three analytical concepts: rationalities, technologies and effects (Bacchi, 2009). By focusing on rationalities, the production of knowledge shaping the understanding of reality is important and decides what is understood as reasonable in the particular context of music teacher education. Technologies refer to the practical methods, the techniques, that enable the governing of the admission tests, while effects focus on how the human subjects are constructed and shaped by the power. This might be seen as equivalent to any discourse analysis; however, what is added in a governmental analysis is an examination of how powerful discourses permeate individual subjectivities by certain techniques, or technologies of power. The subjects are governed by technologies in connection with what is considered to be "truth", that is, in accordance with the discourse. In the context of admission tests to music teacher education, the technologies used in the tests are inseparable from knowledge production, that is, from the dominant discourses of what is believed as truth regarding music teacher education and the music teacher profession. In the analysis, tools and concepts of rhetorical and discursive social psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) were also used to analyse the rhetorical organisation of language and on strategies used by the jury members when positioning themselves and others. In the analysis of the transcribed interviews, a number of questions were put to the data: How are the admission tests legitimated? What technologies of power are used in the shaping of the conduct? What subjectivities are produced? To challenge the researchers' own assumptions and acknowledge confirmation bias, we have presented and discussed our analyses and results at various research conferences and seminars. The fact that we are three researchers, based at three different universities, has also contributed to minimise bias.

Something good for all – gatekeepers at work

In the analysis of the jury members' focus groups conversations and the interviews, the applicants are positioned as fragile and exposed as future music teachers. The teachers at the academy are positioned as caring professionals. In line with this, the tests are often legitimated by evoking an ethos of consideration and care. In almost all interviews the admission tests are constructed as something good for all, for the academy as well as for the applicants, no matter whether the applicants pass or fail the tests. Through care as a technology of power, the entrance tests are legitimated by a rhetoric of well-being of both the applicants as future music students and of the music teachers, the staff and the other students at the academy. This well-being is constructed as a way to avoid future problems. In the following, quotes from focus groups illustrate how a rhetoric of care is operating by the jurors' positionings in legitimating the tests as something good for all.

The fragile applicant

Care for the applicants is often operating through the jurors' ethical positionings. Even though the jurors acknowledge that taking the admission tests can be hard for the applicants, they point out that the tests are humane in that the jurors' discussions take place privately, without the applicant present in the room. In one of the juries assessing vocal and instrumental skills, the interviewer asked about their opinion of the idea of using grades from high school instead of admission tests. These jurors, like those in nearly all juries in the study, unanimously agreed on the impossibility of using upper secondary school grades for selection. However, they offered different reasons for not using grades. Most often, the reason was articulated as grades being unreliable and as bad indicators of applicants' musicality. Admission tests, on the other hand, were constructed by the jurors as giving the applicants a fairer chance:

We get a glimpse of where they are in their process, how they could absorb the education, I think, in some way. You still get a little hint about where they are somewhere in ... because ... I think, that is, for it to be fair with the students ... then you should use this type of test. Because we think now, now he is very exposed here, but he is not ... he does not hear us otherwise ... But if we think of him and if he were to enrol in the programme he would fall very, very far behind and would have a very, very hard time. And it's maybe more about us not exposing them to that, I think.

Young musicians are positioned as fragile and unable to handle a situation at a disadvantage, since that might demoralise them. Through the admission tests, the academy can protect the students from this by making sure that only the applicants who demonstrate the relevant knowledge will be admitted. On the other hand, the jury members position themselves as incredibly skilled predictors, able to anticipate the students' short- as well as long-term development. Not exposing them to the possibility of falling behind and being forced to work very hard is seen as a way of caring.

What is also constantly stressed in all the talks about the admission tests is that the tests as well as the test results should be handled with great care. The rhetoric of a main instrument jury shows how the position as caring is used to legitimate the test. Not testing sight reading is constructed as a considerate way of assessing the applicants:

I think that the test, I think it is good ... and also as it is ... as <u>we</u> do it. We do not have sight reading tests of the kind here that are ... how shall I put it ... arduous in the way that separate the wheat from the chaff in a bad way, as <u>I</u> see it ... Because I do not think it is ... it is not interesting to put people on a slippery slope ... but on the other hand it is important to understand ... musicality, communication skills and skills competence. And that you can see here.

In the excerpt above, the emphasised "we" and "I", as well as the utterance of not having tough elements in this test, might be seen as positioning oneself as even more responsible and caring than other jury members and/or other institutions.

The failing music student and the inspiring academy teachers

In the following excerpt, the jurors talk about the importance of assessing the extent to which a singer has sufficient competence as an ensemble musician:

They must have enough knowledge to be able to do so. Otherwise, there may be people who ... who may still be on the limit and so on, but yes, it, but it may be, because there are some students here who, like this, yes, it ... and it will be difficult for them, very, they have to fight very hard ... and it's not fun either for them or for us.

Students with inadequate musical knowledge that just barely meets the requirements, have to work very hard during the teacher education, which here is articulated as equivalent with not having "fun" – neither for the student nor for the teachers at the academy. Taking care of the applicants by excluding them from the music teacher education through a rhetoric about preventing them from having to work too hard or protecting them from risk of failure in one or several courses, is a consistent trait in the focus group talks. To fail a course is constructed as a personal defeat for the student. The same rhetoric is common in all juries; in the excerpt below, a music theory jury uses the word "disservice" when talking about admitting a student with weak knowledge in music theory:

Then the big question is, the ones you actually take in, who do not have enough knowledge to pass the course, then we have really done them a disservice. Then they fail in music theory.

A common opinion expressed in the conversations with the jurors is that not getting a pass in a course is a total failure. It is taken for granted that all music teacher students should succeed in all programme courses. Music teacher students failing courses is therefore not considered something that is at stake, neither for a music teacher student nor for the academy. Rather, what is at stake is the question of to what extent the students are able to fit into the culture of the academy:

Yes, we have the hope with xxx (unclear), that is what we have, hopes ... that we believe ... We are investing something in this horse. But we have no guarantees, but when we are positive and like to work with them it becomes one ... a rotation of crops ... they learn and get better and we get better at teaching them. We get on a good track from the start and there are types that we will be able to handle.

In this excerpt, teachers at the academy are constructed as positive, inspiring and good at teaching just as long as the students are good enough and teachable. The logic becomes credible: Caring for the applicants is a way of caring for the academy as well as caring for the inspiring teachers at the academy. In this way, selecting students by assessing their performance on tests benefits both the students and the teachers at the academy.

Correspondingly, legitimating the admission test as a way of caring for the academy is constructed as a way of ensuring the high quality of the programme. In the excerpt below, how quality within music teacher education is taken for granted as something connected to music quality, is illustrated by a juror in singing:

I don't know. Because I can still think that ... there are two aspects and one is that we want to maintain the quality of the programmes ... those who we examine as music teachers should ... you should be inspired by their high level. But at the same time, there are lot of musicians at the upper secondary schools' music programmes who would really be enthusiastic as teachers ...

The exposed future music teacher

In the jury discussions, the task of the jury members is said to be to select those who are likely to succeed both in their studies and as future professional music teachers. By basing their decisions on care for the applicants, jurors construct the test as something that is also good for those who are denied access. When applicants are rejected as lacking the ability to assimilate their learning and eventually apply it in their professional lives, such rejection is easily justified as an expression of care. One main instrument jury discusses the benefits of admission tests in music, compared with other kinds of tests:

It is not entirely fair, I think, to accept a student whom you doubt will be able to manage in a full professional life for five years, and let it go five years and then experience, after three, four years in the profession, that it was not a smart choice. Maybe you should have heard that opinion before, I think.

In the excerpt above, it is stated that it would be a mistake to admit a student who lacks qualities relevant for a music teacher. In this jury member's comment, it is taken for granted that a student who does not demonstrate abilities relevant to the music teacher profession already at the entrance tests will struggle as a music teacher in the future. What is remarkable in the group's further discussion is that nothing is said about the possibility to learn some skills that would be useful for a professional music teacher during the teacher education. To exclude an applicant who does not seem to have inherent teacher qualities is constructed as humane and "fair".

Governing through care is, as previously mentioned, made visible in relation to the jurors' talk about the music teacher profession. In the discussions, many jury members

express feelings of responsibility for the applicants' future job success. Depending on the juror's own knowledge, different kinds of abilities and skills are constructed as needed. One juror of music theory argues that good knowledge of music theory provides the security one needs as a music teacher. By referring to his own experiences, he emphasises the importance of having sufficient prior knowledge in music theory in his field:

Juror: When I went to high school, my music teacher came to me and asked ...

can you write an arrangement for the school choir ... because she could

not ...

Interviewer: Yes, that situation may always exist, but how do you think about this in

relation to your tests in music theory and hearing?

Juror: Yes, but then, the music teacher who works in the public school must

have a great foundation of craftsmanship, that is, a foundation of skills. As wide as possible and as deep as possible. Music theory provides security, all skills should provide a professional role and security in the professional role. Because you can see what happens to teachers who are on sick leave and who disappear. Then you have to change profession and do something else out of it then. So, it is important that we do not let out

teachers who cannot succeed professionally.

Graduating music teachers without sufficient skills is presented as putting them at risk. The juror reinforces his argument by linking inadequate musical skills to teachers' sick leave and abandoned careers as music teachers. Securing the students' musical skills becomes in this example a way of taking care of both the students and the music teacher profession.

When talking about the importance of testing the applicants' leadership skills, a jury member uses the same rhetoric as in the excerpt above. However, contrary to skills in music theory, leadership skills are constructed as something very hard to learn. Either you have them, or you don't. Those who do not have a "natural" ability will be insecure in the classroom:

I think it's good and I think you can too, so you have this with ... what should I say ... when you are out in a classroom, so it should, so you really need ... it takes a lot ... You need to have this natural leadership ability to lead, otherwise so ... eh ... it has ... It's a personal disposition of sorts, you can learn a lot of it too, but somehow you need to be this type leadership type and like to lead ... Because if you are the slightest bit unsure, you are toast in today's school.

What is emphasised in the excerpt above is the academies' responsibility to both the applicants and the music teacher profession. This is done by taking care of those who do not fulfil the demands set up by the jurors. Talking about having a "natural gift" for leadership indicates that leadership is not something one learns; rather, it is an innate ability. Denying

access to those who do not have certain innate abilities is constructed as a way of caring, since these applicants would not succeed as music teachers. Several such allegedly non-learnable abilities and skills are mentioned in the talks. Other examples are "the natural way of playing music, something that cannot be learnt", or "having a certain personality".

The production of knowledge

Our analysis has focused on governmentality and the production of knowledge in the jurors talk. The theoretical strength of the concept of governmentality is that it allows us to look for what is going on beyond laws and regulations in shaping subjects to become amenable to governing. In this study care has been visible as a technique of governing, which functions as a gentle and considerate way of handling the applicants, aiming at the applicants' well-being. In Foucault's (1955/1977) pastoral power, care is a central technique of power, creating space for the members of the juries who can interact and express their professionalism. Pastoral power originated within the church, where salvation could be achieved by the pastor's care of the flock, and Foucault argued that pastoral power extends beyond the church in several institutions attending to the well-being of both individuals and communities (Dean, 1999). However, care is built on deep knowledge of the individuals and their confessions. Since our empirical data of this study does not include analysis of the verbal exchange between the applicants and the jurors during the admission tests, it is hard to know whether the jurors learned anything about the applicants' background, thoughts or wishes. Hence, in general, the jurors' knowledge of the applicants was devoid of any confessional information. Rather, their impressions of the applicants were built on assumptions based on their musical and pedagogical performances exclusively. Despite this, judgements were legitimated with statements about the individuals' personalities and future abilities and the need to save the individual from failing later on. This is a form of productive power that is embodied in the rules through which a music student is differentiated in the social practice of music teacher education. From a Foucauldian perspective, this could be seen as an ethical project (Foucault, 1994) of exclusion of individuals from the social life of music teaching. However, through care as a technology of power, this ethical project must be considered a tension between exclusion and emancipation. In this study, failing applicants are excluded from becoming music teachers, and at the same time they are rescued from struggling in the future.

Concluding thoughts

Special requirements and selections in the form of proficiency tests have long been used as sorting tools in higher music education (Jørgensen, 2009). However, there is surprisingly

little research on admission tests, given the decisive importance for applicants' possibilities to pursue careers as music teachers. Our research has so far elucidated that knowledge production during admission tests is based not solely on demonstrated musical skills, but also on jurors' assessment of the individuals' attitude and dress styles (Sandberg-Jurström et al., 2021b). In this article, we have shown how discourses on the applicants' personalities are based on care as technology of power. Although these practices are built on the best of intentions, in the sense that the aim is to provide the best possible music teachers for an excellent school music education, the operating discourse of admission tests as something good for all is built on governmental rationality and the assumptions that the tests make it possible to reach conclusions about applicants' future development.

Our results are in line with music education research discussing issues of hegemonic discourses and traditions governing higher music education institutions (Angelo et al., 2021b; Laes & Westerlund, 2018; Nerland, 2004). Admission tests to higher music education are gates where those discourses are made quite visible. Besides, researchers agree that these traditions are hard to challenge (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Jordhus-Lier, 2018). We argue, however, that hegemonic discourses in higher education are products of power, operating beyond the state or traditional forms of top-down hierarchical control and as such always open for change. Governmentality analysis offers a critical approach and opens a critical space for exploring resistance in terms of working out alternatives (Foucault, 1955/1977).

The relevance of admission tests has been questioned by researchers from different countries over the last decades, and this questioning could in itself be a way of practising resistance. In 2007, Froehlich stated that we, as teachers and researchers in academia, have to consider whether the gates of academia should be open to all who ask for entry, or only to those who correspond to the core values of the music academy. She asks: "Do we really want the gates of academia open to all who ask for entry, or are we more comfortable teaching those who fit into the academic world that we have helped to conceptualize and frame?" (Froehlich, 2007, p. 8). In 2008, Koza stated: "Stringent and restrictive notions of what constitutes competence, together with narrow definitions of legitimate musical knowledge, shut out potential teachers from already underrepresented culture groups" (p. 146).

Maybe now is the time to re-make the policy of admission tests to music teacher education? If so, we could benefit from Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000), who remind us that this is not only a question of inclusion of marginalised groups into the academy, looking at categories such as race, gender or class. We should also recognise that both students and staff are intertwined in the discursive rules governing higher music education in relation to specific contextual perspectives. Therefore, we must consider increasing transparency in the recruitment processes (Sandberg-Jurström et al., 2021a, 2021b). And, in addition, this study has shown that we must also take into account the ethical aspects of power operating in the governing of the tests for admission to music teacher education.

Author biographies

Monica Lindgren, with a PhD in Music Education, is Professor at the Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her research is directed towards aesthetic/ artistic learning in relation to issues of power, identity and inclusion in various types of educational contexts.

Ragnhild Sandberg-Jurström, with a Phd in Music Education, is Senior Lecturer in music education at the Ingesund School of Music, Karlstad university, Sweden. Her research focuses on conditions for musi- cal learning and development as well as formative and summative feedback/assessment in music teacher education, especially with regard to the use of body resources.

Olle Zandén, with a Phd in Music Education, is Associate Professor in Music Education at the Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. His research is focused on the music classroom, especially with regard to evaluative and communicative aspects of music teaching and learning.

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