

The involvement of young Portuguese people with Philharmonic Bands – a cultural and social perspective

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ABSTRACT

1. Theoretical background

This paper gives an overview of a two and a half years study addressing the involvement of young Portuguese people with Philharmonic Bands. It looks into the ways musical identities are constructed within a specific cultural and social context, the Philharmonic Band, and is, therefore, affiliated to the area of cultural and social studies.

2. Aim of the study

The purpose of the study was to analyse and interpret, under a social and cultural perspective, the musical context of the Philharmonic Band, as a milieu of socialization and enculturation of young people where musical identity is forged and a personal narrative is constructed.

3. Methodology and Methods

This study used mainly a qualitative, and phenomenological methodology combined with the case study approach both for the data collection about the memories of the young musicians on their participation in the Philharmonic Bands, and the characterisation of these ensembles as an overall social and cultural phenomenon. The purpose of obtaining significant biographical information was reached through individual and collective interviewing. At the beginning of the research a questionnaire was sent out to the 300 students and former students of the college of Education in Porto (May 2005), in order to identify those that have participated and/or still participate in the musical activity of Philharmonic Bands. The questionnaire included closed and open-ended questions concerning the subjects' family history and personal past or current involvement with Bands. Analysis and discussion of data includes the results from the returned questionnaire, and the findings of an in depth collective case study, built from seventeen individual interviews and one collective interview to former students

with a long personal and family history in Philharmonic Bands.

4. Main research findings

From the 300 questionnaires that were sent out, 124 were returned. From the 35 subjects who reported to be still involved with Bands, 8 were conductors, 4 were teachers, and 2 assumed management functions in the ensemble in which they perform. Gender distribution of this group showed a percentage of 63% male, and 37% female. Content analysis of the interviews showed that two processes concurring to the production of a musical identity, biographical and relational, were strongly evidenced. Further, an impressive relevance in terms of social and cultural analysis came to light, revealing the many ways in which the Philharmonic Band musicians see themselves within that particular culture.

5. Conclusions and implications for music education

Taking into account the great discursive complexity of the analyzed data, the conceptual definitions of identity in general, and musical identity in particular, seem to be in need of further attention bearing in mind the social and cultural contexts where a musical life takes place and flourishes. Further, important implications for music education might arise from the understanding of the effect that a strong instrumental practice in the context of a Philharmonic Band may have, as a motivator for young children to pursue an involvement with music for life.

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