

**Piano Musicians' Identity Negotiations in the Context  
of the Academy and Transition to Working Life  
A Socio-cultural Approach**

Helsinki 2012



Sini Juuti

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of the Academy and Transition to Working Life  
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Abstract

The study as a whole examined piano musicians' identity negotiations in the context of their music studies and their transition to working life. This research report and the articles accompanying it also introduce a socio-culturally oriented approach to the study of musical identities.

Study I explored adult instrumental students' identity work while negotiating entry to a prestigious music academy. The specific focus was on how students' accounts of their competencies vis-à-vis their peers are implicated in their musical identity work, and how students' accounts of their own and others' participation in and engagement with the musical practices of the academy resourced their musical identity work. A further concern was how students' accounts of life-courses and trajectories were implicated in their musical identity work.

Study II focused on how solo piano students' identity projects were mediated within the student-teacher relationship. It examined how solo piano students' identity projects were mediated within and in relation to their interpretative work on the canon, undertaken along with their teacher, and further, how their identity as a solo piano student was negotiated in relation to other ongoing musical identity projects.

Study III focused on career-young professional pianists' talk about the transition from study within a music academy to working life. The focus was especially on the ways in which they characterised the nature and significance of this transition, from very traditional practice, and how they (re-)negotiated their professional identities as working musicians and pianists in their contemporary working lives.

The participants of the overall study were ten solo piano students who were interviewed once during their studies at the Sibelius Academy. Four of these original participants were followed up for about eight years from the original interviews when entering professional working life. The starting point for the methods used in the study was the socio-cultural framework plus qualitative thematic analysis. Within this study, identity negotiations and the relation between individual and social aspects of identity were researched through the collection of the musicians' accounts of their musical histories and experiences situated in the daily practices of their study and work. The analytical method involved the initial identification of key themes, with the detailed analysis then focusing on the particular ways in which the participants talked about the process of becoming musicians.

The results showed how identity work is a complex, mediated process. The comparative dynamics amongst peers were seen as a key mediator of the identity work done during studies at the academy. Furthermore, student-teacher interactions emerged as crucial sites for identity negotiations. It seemed that a collegial and collaborative approach to the interpretation of music, and the associated understanding that came with it, fostered professional growth and enhanced artistic confidence. This work also highlighted the conflicts and problematic identity positions that emerge in the creative relationship between the teacher and the student—a relationship in which visions and insights are not necessarily shared. The analyses also exemplify how in some

circumstances the envisaged reactions of the teacher and the associated risk of troubled identity positions problematised students' engagement with popular forms of music-making. Furthermore, it was observed that the creation of novel interpretations of pieces from the canon form a central aspect of one's personal musical identity and is a socially and culturally situated act.

The results of this study also highlighted how, especially during the students' transition to the music community, they seemed unable to define community-level norms and expectations. Moreover, they 'talked against' some of these. 'Talking against' emerged as strongly agentic identity work. Thereafter, in the context of the transition from music studies to working life, there was clear evidence of the emergence of the informants' own 'stories', own 'ways' and the use of inner resources. Agency was thus clearly observable in the career-young professional musicians' construction and re-construction of their own creative practices and paths. These paths were not fixed or dependent on communal expectations; rather, they reflected freedom, widening perspectives and independence, the embracing of multiple influences, and the anchoring of individual lives in more holistic ways. One of the key elements in the process of becoming agentic seemed to be the acceptance of multiplicity.

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Keywords: *identity work, music students, socio-cultural approach, transitions, agency*

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Sini Juuti

Pianistien identiteettineuvottelut musiikkikoulutuksessa ja siirtymässä koulutuksesta työelämään: sosio-kulttuurinen lähestymistapa

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### Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin pianistien identiteettineuvottelua musiikin opinnoissa sekä siirtymässä työelämään. Tutkimus esittelee myös sosio-kulttuurisen lähestymistavan muusikon identiteetin tutkimisessa.

Osatutkimuksessa I perehdyttiin aikuisten instrumenttiopiskelijoiden identiteettityöhön heidän neuvotellessaan sisäänpääsyään arvostettuun musiikkiakatemiaan. Erityisen huomion kohteena olivat opiskelijoiden kuvaukset heidän omasta osaamisestaan sekä oman osaamisen vertailusta opiskelutovereiden osaamiseen, ja mitä nämä merkitsivät muusikon identiteettityössä. Tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin sitä miten opiskelijoiden kuvaukset omasta ja toisten osallistumisesta sekä sitoutumisesta musiikkiakatemian käytäntöihin näyttäytyivät heidän identiteettityössään. Lisäksi käsiteltiin sitä kuinka opiskelijoiden kuvaukset elämänculusta ja trajektoreista olivat yhteydessä muusikon identiteettityöhön.

Osatutkimus II keskittyi tarkastelemaan soolopianistiopiskelijoiden identiteettiprojektien välittymistä opiskelija-opettaja -suhteessa. Tutkimuksen kohteena oli erityisesti se, miten soolopianistiopiskelijat tekivät identiteettityötään luodessaan tulkintoja soitettavista teoksista opettajansa johdolla ja miten he neuvottelivat identiteettiään soolopianisteina suhteessa muihin musiikillisiin intresseihinsä ja identiteetteihinsä.

Osatutkimuksessa III tutkittiin uransa alkuvaiheessa olevien ammattipianistien kuvauksia heidän siirtymästään opinnoista musiikkikoulutuksesta työelämään. Erityisen tarkastelun kohteena olivat tavat kuvata siirtymän luonnetta ja merkitystä traditionaalisesta käytäntöyhteisöstä työelämään. Lisäksi tarkasteltiin miten he (uudelleen)neuvottelivat ammatillisia identiteettejään työelämässä.

Tutkimuksen osallistujajoukko muodostui kymmenestä soolopianistiopiskelijasta, jotka haastateltiin kerran heidän opintojensa aikana Sibelius-Akatemiassa. Neljää heistä seurattiin uusin haastatteluin heidän työelämään siirtymän aikoihin noin kahdeksan vuotta ensimmäisten haastattelujen jälkeen. Lähtökohtana tutkimuksen menetelmille olivat sosio-kulttuurinen viitekehys ja laadullinen teema-analyysi. Identiteettineuvotteluita sekä identiteetin yksilöllisen ja sosiaalisen aspektin suhdetta tutkittiin keräämällä muusikoiden kuvauksia heidän musiikillisesta historiastaan sekä heidän arkisiin käytäntöihin liittyvistä kokemuksistaan opintojen ajalta ja työelämästä. Lähestymistapa sisälsi keskeisten teemojen tunnistamisen ja analyysin, jossa keskitettiin tapoihin kuvata muusikoksi tuleminen prosessia.

Tulokset osoittivat kuinka identiteettityö on monitahoinen ja sosio-kulttuurisesti välittynyt prosessi. Vertailu opiskelutovereihin ja siihen liittyvä dynamiikka näyttäytyivät keskeisenä välittävänä tekijänä identiteettityössä opintojen aikana. Lisäksi oppilas-opettaja vuorovaikutussuhde ilmeni ratkaisevaksi paikaksi identiteettineuvotteluille. Kollegiaalinen ja yhteistoiminnallinen lähestymistapa musiikillisten tulkintojen luomiseen, ja siitä seurannut musiikillinen yhteisymmärrys, näyttivät edistävän ammatillista kasvua ja lisäävän luottamusta itsen taiteilijana. Tutkimus nosti esiin myös konfliktit ja ongelmalliset identiteettipositiot, jotka ilmenivät opetta-

jan ja oppilaan välisessä suhteessa, kun visioita ja näkemyksiä ei välttämättä jaettu. Analyyseissä havainnollistui myös se, miten joissain olosuhteissa opettajan reaktiot ja niihin liittynyt ongelmallistuneiden identiteettipositioiden riski hankaloitti opiskelijoiden ryhtymistä ja sitoutumista rytmimusiikin tekemiseen. Lisäksi näytti siltä, että uudenlaisten tulkintojen luominen klassisen musiikin teoksista muodostaa perustan muusikon identiteetille, ja että tämä on sosiaaliseen ja kulttuuriseen kontekstiin sijoittuva tapahtuma. Tutkimuksen tuloksissa korostui myös miten opiskelijat eivät kyenneet opintoihinsa siirtymisen vaiheessa itse määrittelemään tai vaikuttamaan yhteisötasoisin normeihin ja odotuksiin. Enemmänkin he 'puhuivat vastaan' osaa näistä. 'Vastaan puhuminen' näyttäytyi voimakkaana identiteettitoimijuutena. Kuitenkin siirtymävaiheessa opinnoista työelämään oman 'tarinan' ja 'tien' sekä omien sisäisten resurssien löytäminen oli selkeää. Toimijuus näkyi voimakkaana työuransa alussa olevien muusikoiden rakentaessa ja uudelleen rakentaessa omia luovia käytäntöjään ja polkujaan – ei riippuvaisia yhteisöllisistä odotuksista, mutta heijastaen vapautta, laajentuneita näkökulmia, moninaisia vaikutteita ja ankkuroituen kokonaisvaltaisemmin omaan elämään. Yksi keskeisistä elementeistä toimijuuden saavuttamisessa näytti olleen moninaisuuden hyväksyminen.

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Avainsanat: *identiteettiyö, musiikin opiskelijat, sosiokulttuurinen lähestymistapa, siirtymät, toimijuus*



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## Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>2 Conceptualising identity</b> .....	3
2.1 Notions of identity.....	3
2.2 Research on musical identity.....	4
2.3 A socio-cultural approach to identity.....	6
2.4 A socio-cultural approach to musical identities.....	9
<b>3 The aims and progress of the research</b> .....	13
3.1 Research problems and research questions of the study.....	13
<b>4 Methods</b> .....	17
4.1 Studying identity in music.....	17
4.2 The context of the study and the participants.....	18
4.3 The research interviews.....	22
4.4 Analysis.....	25
<b>5 Results</b> .....	31
5.1 Musical identities in transition: solo-piano students' accounts of entering the academy.....	31
5.2 Collaboration, conflict and the musical identity work of solo- piano students: the significance of the student-teacher relationship.....	36
5.3 Tracing the transition from study to a contemporary creative working life: the creative trajectories of professional musicians.....	41
5.4 Summarising the research process and findings.....	44
5.5 Drawing themes together: the characteristics of solo-pianists' identity work.....	44
5.5.1 Mediation and collaboration.....	45
5.5.2 Trouble.....	47
5.5.3 Agency.....	49
5.5.4 Creativity in identity negotiation.....	52
5.5.5 Transitions.....	53

<b>6 Discussion</b> .....	55
6.1 A return to the socio-cultural starting point.....	55
6.2 Methodological considerations.....	57
6.3 Further challenges for research work .....	62
6.4 Implications for the learning environment, mentoring and multiplicity.....	63
<b>References</b> .....	67

## **Original publications**

### **List of figures**

Figure 1. Main concepts connecting Studies I–III .....	45
Figure 2. Socio-cultural resources in identity negotiations.....	47

### **List of tables**

Table 1. A brief description of the specific research tasks and the materials and analytical methods used in each study .....	16
Table 2. Summary of the main findings .....	44

## List of original publications

The thesis is based on the following articles, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Juuti, S., & Littleton, K. (2010). Musical identities in transition: Solo-piano students' accounts of entering the academy. *Psychology of Music* 38(4), 481–497.
- II Wirtanen, S., & Littleton, K. (2004). Collaboration, Conflict and the Musical Identity Work of Solo-Piano Students: The Significance of the Student-Teacher Relationship. In D. Miell & K. Littleton (Eds.), *Collaborative Creativity* (pp. 26–39). Free Association Press: London.
- III Juuti, S., & Littleton, K. (2012). Tracing the Transition from Study to a Contemporary Creative Working Life: The Trajectories of Professional Musicians. *Vocations and Learning* 5(1), 5–21.

Copies of the articles are appended to the report.<sup>1</sup>

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# 1 Introduction

The driving force for this research project lay in the desire to understand more deeply the challenges faced by solo piano students and solo-pianists in (re)negotiating their identities and professional musicianship. Becoming a musician involves identity construction, and it is a multi-faceted process, one that includes the challenge of combining both individual and social aspects of identity. So far, the studies in the field have mostly drawn on individually-based approaches to understanding identity as a subjective individual achievement. Combining the individual and social aspects of identity means taking into account also aspects arising from group and community membership. There have in recent years been radical changes in understanding identity, in parallel with the increasing use of socio-cultural approaches, and there is a need to apply recent theorising to music. One of the fundamental reasons for studying adult musicians' identity construction was the paucity of basic research conducted in the area. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for research that would make it possible to theorise and understand how significant transitional periods, encountered as part of the process of becoming a musician, are characterised and construed by musicians.

Musical identity work plays a key role in defining oneself as a musician, in the contexts of study and working life, and in the transitions between different contexts. Becoming a musician is not just about the acquisition of technical skills. Learning music happens in a socio-cultural context, and is thus about the broader process of becoming a musician. From the perspective of an individual musician, it is of great importance how she/he positions her/himself as a musician, music student, learner, performer, band-member, chamber musician, and so on. Furthermore, in addition to being personally meaningful for individual musician, it is undoubtedly significant for music institutions or work communities if musicians find themselves to be agentic members of the community. Understanding identity work is especially important in contexts in which musicians prepare themselves for a diverse career in music. In this period of their lives they must work with individual qualities, such as self-expression and skills, while at the same time, being (or becoming) a member of the community of working or studying musicians.

The present study, in its entirety, comprises three separate articles (reporting sub-studies) and a summary. The articles are appended to this report and they are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals, I–III. Chapter 2 discusses and evaluates different conceptions of identity in the field of music.

It also identifies dilemmas and challenges in respect of identity work. Chapter 3 presents the purpose of the research, the research problems, and the research questions. It further includes a description of the overall study design and outlines the studies themselves. In Chapter 4 the methodological choices are described and evaluated. Chapter 5 summarises the main findings of the studies. It also draws together and concludes the findings of the three studies. The results of the entire body of research can be found in more detail in the appended articles I–III. Chapter 6 discusses the methodological considerations of the work and returns to the theoretical basis of the overall study. This chapter also discusses the challenges for further research, and presents various implications and practical recommendations drawn from the study.



## 2 Conceptualising identity

The purpose of this chapter is, in the first place, to discuss and evaluate different approaches to understanding and theorising musicians' identity. In the following pages, existing approaches will be described, and the outlines of a critique will be presented. The criticisms in question arise from the individualistic starting point in music psychology research. In general terms, it will be argued that up until recently there has been a failure to consider the socio-cultural processes of identity formation. Thus, musicians' development has been construed as an individual and sequence-dependent process, with identity being understood as a subjective individual achievement. Furthermore, as pointed out by Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald (2002), there has been an overall lack of research into adult identities in music. The second main purpose of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical approach and starting point that was adopted for the study as a whole; the approach taken was aimed at overcoming some of the weaknesses of previous research in the field.

### 2.1 Notions of identity

The concept of identity is widely used in the behavioural sciences. However, given the variety of disciplinary backgrounds, it is not surprising that there is no single agreed definition. At its most basic, the study of identity involves an interest in 'names and looks' (Brah, 1996). One way of looking at identity is to see it as a subjective, individual achievement. Such an approach will focus on accounts of 'who one is' (Wetherell, 2010). The concept of identity is often used within this understanding to refer to personal identity. In addition, concepts of self-image or self-concept are used to describe the different ways in which individuals see themselves, and the concept of self-esteem may be incorporated into an evaluative component of the self.

In addition to understanding identity as a personal property, identity is used to describe social identity, including membership of, for example groups, networks and communities. Seen in these terms, research on identity has translated into the investigation of, for example, social divisions and 'belonging' (Wetherell, 2010). Social constructionist approaches, for their part, have highlighted the notion that identity cannot be understood through a division between the individual and the social; rather, the self is viewed as developing through interaction and conversation with others (Mead, 1934; Giddens, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wetherell, 2006). Social constructionists suggest that people have many identities, each of

which is created in interaction with other people; there is no single ‘core’ identity.

## **2.2 Research on musical identity**

### *Research on social categories*

Until relatively recently, the concept of identity received little attention within studies on music psychology. According to the relatively small body of work produced, social influences in the field of music have often been conceptualised through a division between personal and social identity; here, personal identity refers to individuals’ unique qualities, while social identity refers to the social categories to which people belong (Crozier, 1997).

Under these circumstances there has been considerable interest in looking at musicians’ development through various social groups, for example their gender and their age group (Harrison & O’Neill, 2000; 2002; O’Neill & Boulton, 1996; Bruce & Kemp, 1993; Green, 1997; O’Neill, Ivaldi, & Fox, 2002; Howe, Davidson, Moore, & Sloboda, 1995; O’Neill, 1997).

It is clear that in music psychology research, attention has been paid to certain social groups and to identity work in respect of these groups. However, these have been explored separately, with little reference to the relationship between them; nor has consideration been given to the connections between the personal and the social. This has meant that researchers have isolated social groups in order to look ‘inside them’, seeking to examine some of their functions and processes, and to consider the relevance of these groups’ in music education (O’Neill & Green, 2004). Yet increasingly, social reality has been seen as much more complex. Individuals can be viewed as embedded in a complex web of social groups, and these are dynamic and fluid (O’Neill & Green, 2004).

A complex system cannot be fully understood through consideration of isolated parts or simple concepts. There are many examples of research where this approach has been useful; however, ‘it remains relatively ineffective in explaining social phenomena’ (O’Neill & Green, 2004). In order to gain a better understanding of learning in music, it is necessary to take a more integrated view of the groups and subjects under study (Hallam & Lamont, 2004). Nevertheless, although research needs to take into account the combinations and changing nature of social groups, this is easier said than done.

### *Research on listening to music*

An example of early attempts to deal with social complexity involves research concerning musical preferences. Larson (1995) argued that listening to

music in adolescence plays an important role in the integration of one's private self, and that social identity plays a key role in the process of identification with peers. Hargreaves (1986) and Kemp (1996) considered musical taste in relation to the personal and social aspects of an individual's identity (see also North & Hargreaves, 2000; Sloboda, O'Neill, & Ivaldi, 2001). However, these studies—on musical preferences, and on the implications of musical preferences for personal and/or social identity—were based on concepts of personal and social identity and did not greatly illuminate the broader interaction between the individual and social facets of musical identity.

#### *Research on developmental stages*

In addition to examinations of musicians' development through various social groups and musicians' identity through listening to music, there has been a good deal of work done on musicians' identity via attempts to characterise the optimal development of professional musicians, stage by stage. Indeed, notions of a progression through a fixed sequence of developmental stages (see for example Sosniak, 1985; Manturzevska, 1990; MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Majjala, 2003) are part of a long tradition of music research concerned with theorising musicians' development and identity construction. There is no doubt that this approach has given important insights into the developmental stages that musicians pass through. It provides a starting point for looking at the individual basis of development and identity, highlighting stages such as the development of musical memory, the acquisition of technical capacities, and the progression to personal interpretative conceptions and know-how (Manturzevska, 1990).

#### *Research on adult musicians*

Relatively few investigations have been conducted on adult music students' identity work, although Davidson (2002) provides a notable exception through her focus on adult solo performers' identity work. Throughout the history of music research, there has been considerable interest in studying children and young people—in both formal and informal educational settings, and in family contexts (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002; Davidson & Burland, 2006; Lamont, 2002; Lamont, Hargreaves, Marshall, & Tarrant, 2003; O'Neill, 2002, 2005; O'Neill, Ivaldi, & Fox, 2002; O'Neill & Sloboda, 1997). Beyond this, the teaching and learning of music in tertiary music education has been somewhat neglected in European research. There have been studies on teacher training within academies, instrumental practice and the teacher-student relationship (Jørgensen, 2004), but almost no attempts to

understand musicians' identity development by looking at adult musicians and their studies in music, their relation to music, and their work as musicians.

### 2.3 A socio-cultural approach to identity

This section aims to introduce the main pillars of a socio-culturally oriented approach, with a view to studying the complex phenomenon of identity.

#### *Understanding identity*

Understandings of the concept of identity have gone through radical changes in recent years. Approaches highlighting interaction, including what is referred to as the socio-cultural approach (Moran & John-Steiner, 2004; Wertsch, 1991; Wenger, 1998), have called into question the idea of identity as an individual production. As opposed to an individualistic conception, the socio-cultural approach claims that context and identity cannot be disentangled, and that institutions play an integral part in learning and identity construction.

Contemporary socio-cultural theorising does not conceptualise 'identity' in terms of enduring individual characteristics or dispositions. Rather, identities are construed as being *relational*, i.e. as being constructed and negotiated within and in relation to specific relationships, these in turn being embedded in particular social, cultural and historical contexts (Wertsch, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Holland, 1998). Putting it in slightly different terms, one can say that in highlighting the relational nature of identity, the socio-cultural approach addresses the ways in which identity is (re)constructed and negotiated within and in relation to specific relationships, embedded in different contexts and practices. Furthermore, identity work is assumed to constitute an *on-going* and *dynamic* process of 'becoming', meaning that identities are continually changing within and across diverse relationships and contexts, and also over time. Identities are also assumed to be *multiple*; thus 'different relationships between the individual and other people enabling different identities to emerge and take priority at any time for the person concerned' (MacDonald & Miell, 2002, p. 168). All in all, it seems that identity makes its appearance as something 'complex' and 'occasioned' (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003).

Identity work is seen as an *improvisational* accomplishment which is constituted in interaction within a community of practice, and which involves the continual reproduction and transformation of both the community and the self (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Wenger, 1998; MacDonald & Miell, 2002). Talk is thus seen as constitutive (Potter & Wetherell, 1987); it

is not simply the means by which identity is expressed—rather it is a means by which identity is constructed, contested, *negotiated* and re-negotiated. The term ‘negotiation’ is here not to be understood as a matter of explicit ‘trade’, but as a subtle and implicit way of co-constructing the meaning of a situation through communication (Grossen, 2000). One could say, for example, that the statement ‘I am a musician’ is part of just such a negotiation; it is an attempt to get a matter of opinion or belief elevated to an incontrovertible matter of fact.

All in all, establishing one’s identity as a musician is a messy and complicated co-production. It is fashioned through social interaction, subject to negotiation, and inextricably bound up with the exercise of power (Edley, 2001). Following on from the notion that identities have to be negotiated, it is understood that people’s identities are *performative*—that is, constructed and enacted in their talk (Abell, Stokoe, & Billig, 2004). The assumption, then, is that a speaker is *active* in identity work—active, that is, in an on-going project that includes constructing a personal biography (Gergen, 1994; see also Mishler, 1999).

Identity work is ‘shaped by both the unique circumstances of people’s lives and the meanings at play within the wider society and culture’ (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 23). Identity work thus touches on both personal resources (offered by participants’ experiences and meanings) and local resources (involving social resources, broader assumptions, structures and collective meanings) (Taylor & Littleton, 2008).

Identities are both resourced and constrained by the larger understandings that prevail in the speaker’s social and cultural context (see Taylor & Littleton, 2005). The term *identity trouble* is used to describe socially or culturally based restrictions and constraints in identity work (Wetherell, 1998). ‘Trouble’ thus refers to those points in identity work in which established meanings are not easy to reconcile with personal meanings (see Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

### *Between the individual and the social*

There can be specific tensions between the individual and the social (Wenger, 1998). It should be noted that even if the importance of both the individual and the social has been admitted, diverging interests and tendencies have led to them being discussed and researched often separately. Social theories of identity have, it is true, given considerable emphasis to the contextual nature of identity. However, in its most radical form, ‘situationism’—considered as a sort of contextual determinism—is open to the criticism that it neglects subjectivity and thus also the developmental continuities that exist at the level

of individual subjects. When applying the question of the nature and development of individual identity it can lead at worst to the theorising in which individuals are treated as if they themselves—as ‘individuals’—have no history or context.

Previous assumptions of identity as an individual production have left their mark on more recent discussions in terms of dual notions of the individual and the social (Grossen, 2000). Identity is often talked of in terms of *either* social identity *or* individual identity. This is especially evident in the psychology of music. For its part, the socio-cultural approach to identity is based on nondualist ontological assumptions. The socio-cultural perspective’s nondualist ontology avoids the paradoxes of dualism by arguing that (as an individual) the person is constructed in a social context (Packer & Coicoechea, 2000).

The socio-cultural starting point of the present study means being sensitive to both (i) the broader cultural and more local and (ii) personal meanings/understandings in the (inter)play of speakers’ *talk*. This necessitates focusing on accounts of daily practices and of ‘living’ in a culture and community, rather than starting from, for example, certain social categories of identity. It means being sensitive to the relationship between the individual and the social aspects of identity, and taking into account both psychological and sociological perspectives on identity. Furthermore, instead of relying on theoretical arguments on the union of individual and social, this study will focus on exploring the phenomenon empirically. Hence it reports on an investigation of some points in the practice of musicians (including their talk); these are points in which active individual identity negotiation confronts constructions and positions proposed by the social domain. The substantive question then becomes: how do the social and individual aspects of identity interact and relate to each other in authentic practices and real-life contexts?

### *Agency*

Agency is a concept that is needed when one is seeking to understand the nature of identity work—especially the relation between the individual and the social. At a general level, agency can be defined as a person’s capacity to act in the world and to impact on and transform one’s life circumstances and practices (Barnes, 2000). Socio-cultural theories highlight agency as a socially and culturally situated process of development through participation in the human community (Vygotsky, 1978). Even if a certain sense of individual autonomy is needed to act as a viable subject in social life, agency cannot be seen as standing outside social structures (see Barnes, 2000). Agency is fundamentally a socially and culturally distributed process. From the perspective

perspective of this study, it is necessary also to introduce a post-structuralist approach in which agency lies in the capacity to recognise, resist and master discourses through which individuals are constituted (Davies, 2004). From the perspective of becoming a musician, agency thus implies mastering one's identity negotiation as a music student and as a professional musician, and further, weaving together established and personal meanings.

## **2.4 A socio-cultural approach to musical identities**

This section aims to introduce a socio-culturally oriented approach to the study of musical identities. In order to develop an understanding of identity in the field of music research, it is necessary to break fully with traditions, and to adopt a new starting point.

### *Becoming a musician*

The process of becoming a classical musician does not just involve the individual development of excellent individual technical skills and competencies. Rather, it is a complex, multifaceted, culturally and socially constituted process that also necessitates, amongst other things, cultivating an appreciation of musical traditions and conventions, the creative interpretation of pieces from the canon, and identification with and participation in a particular musical community. That said, studies within the field of music education have, until relatively recently, neglected such important socio-cultural processes (Hargreaves et al., 2002). We now have a secure understanding of, for example, instrumental knowledge, age-related changes in musical understanding, acoustic abilities, perception of tones, scales, intervals, and memory for melody (Hargreaves & North, 1997; Hargreaves et al., 2002); there is, however, a pressing need for research which would help us to understand and theorise the fundamentally social processes that are implicated in becoming a musician. This in turn requires a conceptualisation of learning as participation and as a form of situated action within a community, involving the construction of both communities and subjectivities (Bakhtin, 1986; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Säljö, 2000; Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978, 1987; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch, Del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995).

### *Recent developments in researching musical identities*

The importance of understanding the interactional and relational processes within which musical identities are constructed, negotiated and contested has been highlighted in recent work, for example, by Hargreaves et al. (2002) and by MacDonald and Miell (2002). Hargreaves et al. (2002) conceptualise

musical identities broadly from two different perspectives, namely ‘identities in music’ and ‘music in identities’. The starting point for the concept ‘identities in music’ is based on the socio-cultural argument that ‘identities in music’ are based especially on cultural musical practices. The concept of ‘identities in music’ has a socio-cultural focus, encompassing an interest in practices within broad categories of musical activity, including the culturally defined features of a musician, composer, performer, improviser or teacher. Alongside these generic distinctions there exist some specific distinctions which cut across these categories, deriving from special interest groups, in particular instruments and genres. Work on ‘identities in music’ is specifically interested in practices that are central to the negotiation of identity as a professional musician. In contrast, the concept of ‘music in identities’ takes as its starting point the ways in which people use music as a means of, or a resource for, developing other aspects of their personal identities, including for example gender identity, youth identity and national identity.

Along with new conceptual and paradigmatic openings in the psychology of music, during the early 21th century there has been a growing body of research on the formation and development of individual and group musical identities (see MacDonald, Hargreaves, & Miell, 2002; O’Neill & Green, 2004). Music psychology researchers have presented studies that have highlighted the socio-cultural standpoint as a basis, and in so doing have created a new context for identity research in the field of music (e.g. MacDonald & Miell, 2002; MacDonald, Miell & Wilson, 2005; Wilson & MacDonald, 2005; O’Neill, 2006; Huhtanen, 2005; Wirtanen & Littleton, 2004). The studies conducted have created a new foundation for understanding identity as a dynamic and situated phenomenon, connecting the individual and the social. Individual identity is seen as dependent on positions made available within the discursive and musical practices that are culturally available and embedded within the historical context (O’Neill & Green, 2004). The socio-cultural approach has thus extended research from particular social groups to the socially, culturally and historically mediated context of constructing musical identities. It has also generated new methodological openings by which musical identities can be addressed (see for example MacDonald et al., 2005; also Wilson & MacDonald, 2005). Despite this, there is still a pressing need to develop a firm theoretical and methodological foundation for socio-culturally oriented research in the psychology of music.

### *Transitions and changing contexts*

As indicated above, the socio-cultural approach highlights the ‘relational’ nature of identity, meaning that identity is (re)constructed and negotiated



within and in relation to specific relationships embedded in different contexts and practices. This argument makes it of interest to investigate different kinds of contexts. Instead of relying on traditional theories concerning the development of musicians through a fixed sequence of developmental stages, transitions from one context to another will come under scrutiny. The process of becoming a musician entails the negotiation of significant, complex transitions involving changing contexts, for example, when moving into working life, after completing a programme of formal study. Given this, there is a need for research that will help us to theorise and understand how such significant transitions, encountered as part of the process of becoming a musician, are *characterised and construed by musicians*. It appears that such transitions are extremely salient in respect to musicians' identity negotiations (see Juuti & Littleton, 2012). On a highly practical level, the need to consider musicians' development and the challenges encountered during periods of transition has been discussed in recent music research concerned with understanding, for example, why musicians 'drop out'. Studies of 'drop outs' have highlighted transitions as significant contexts for trouble in subjects' identity work (see MacNamara, Holmes, & Collins, 2008; Gyurcsik, Bray, & Brittain, 2004).

Some of the most notable macro transitions that occur during the early adulthood of many musicians are those associated with gaining admission to an institution such as a music academy or conservatoire, with the intention of becoming a professional musician. Important also are transitions associated with negotiating the passage from study to working life (see MacNamara et al., 2008; 2006). With respect to the transition to study, Burt and Mills (2006) have argued that in order to help students manage this transition smoothly, we need to understand the multiple tensions and conflicts that music students are obliged to confront. For example, notions of personal competence (as compared to other students, and in relationships with others) pose substantive challenges for students early in their professional music studies (e.g. Burt & Mills, 2006; Kingsbury, 1988). In a study exploring the significance of entering the music academy, Juuti and Littleton (2010) also underscored the challenge of combining the personal with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations, while at the same time negotiating membership of the established music culture. According to this study, which involved solo piano performance students, musicians entering the professional field of music are confronted with dilemmas in weaving together established and personal meanings, and their on-going musical identity negotiations are often challenged and troubled.



### 3 The aims and progress of the research

The general aim of this study is to describe and understand solo piano students' and solo-pianists' identity work as they enter the professional field of music. In the process of transition to piano studies young musicians actively negotiate their entry to the professional field of music. Of particular interest is young musicians' transition to studies as well as novices' claims to identities as capable piano students and professional solo-pianists. Furthermore, interest is in the core competence of interpreting pieces of music and the identity work of the pianist implicated in this process. In addition, there is interest in musicians' transition to working life, which is a critical point in their careers when negotiating identities as pianists and professional musicians.

Studying the phenomenon of becoming a musician presents a methodological challenge. Research studies producing only quantitative information are not sufficient to understand the construction of musicians' identities. Accordingly, this study utilised a interpretative and qualitative approach. The research was conducted within a socio-cultural framework on the basis of qualitative research interviews.

#### 3.1 Research problems and research questions of the study

The first **research problem** was framed as follows:

- 1) How, in their talk in the context of the research interview, do master's level solo-instrumentalists actively negotiate their identities as academy students, and solo-pianists of calibre?

To gain an understanding of adult instrumental students' identity work, the focus was on students' negotiation of entry to a prestigious music academy and the professional field of music.

**The research questions** addressed in study I were:

- 1.1 How are students' accounts of entering the academy, and specifically their accounts of their competencies vis-à-vis their peers, implicated in their musical identity work as solo-pianists of calibre and academy students?

- 1.2 How do students' accounts of their own, and others' participation in and engagement with the musical practices of the academy resource their musical identity work?
- 1.3 How are students' accounts of life-courses and trajectories implicated in their musical identity work?

The second **research problem** was:

- 2) How are solo piano students' identity projects mediated within the student-teacher relationship?

Through this second question, some of the processes through which aspiring solo-pianists negotiate an emergent identity as a soloist were highlighted. The significance of the student-teacher relationship for identity work was considered in the contexts of collaboration, conflict and the musical identity work of solo-piano students.

**The research questions** addressed in study II were:

- 2.1 How are solo piano students' identity projects mediated within and in relation to the interpretative work on canon which they undertake with their teacher?
- 2.2 How is an identity as a solo piano student negotiated in the context of the teacher-student relationship in relation to other ongoing musical identity projects?

So far the focus has been on music students' identity work and their transition to study; hence a picture of these students' later phases towards and transition into working life was needed. Accordingly, the third **research problem** was:

- 3) How do career-young professional pianists characterise transition from study to working life and how do these accounts resource their identity negotiations as working, professional musicians?

The purpose of this question was to explore career-young professional pianists' talk about the transition from study within a music academy to working life. The focus is on the ways in which they characterise the nature and significance of this transition, from very traditional practice, and how they (re) negotiate their professional identities as working musicians and pianists in contemporary working lives.

**The research questions** addressed in study III were:

- 3.1 How do career-young professional pianists give accounts of their musicianship in the context of their transition from study to working life?
- 3.2 How do career-young professional pianists' accounts of their musicianship resource their identity negotiations as working musicians in the context of transition from study to working life?

**Table 1.** A brief description of the specific research problems, research questions and the materials and analytical methods used in each study

<u>Research problems and questions</u>	<u>Materials</u>	<u>Analysis</u>	<u>Study</u>
<p>1) <u>How, in their talk in the context of the research interview, do master's level solo-instrumentalists actively negotiate their identities as academy students, and solo-pianists of calibre?</u></p> <p><i>1.1 How are students' accounts of entering the academy, and specifically their accounts of their competences vis-à-vis their peers, implicated in their musical identity work as solo-pianists of calibre and academy students?</i></p> <p><i>1.2 How do students' accounts of their own, and others' participation in and engagement with the musical practices of the academy resource their musical identity work?</i></p> <p><i>1.3 How are students' accounts of life-courses and trajectories implicated in their musical identity work?</i></p>	<p>Research interviews with ten solo piano students during their studies</p>	<p>Thematic analysis</p>	<p>I Musical identities in transition: Solo-piano students' accounts of entering the academy (2010)</p>
<p>2) <u>How solo piano students' identity projects are mediated within teacher-student relationship?</u></p> <p><i>2.1 How are solo piano students' identity projects mediated within and in relation to the interpretative work on canon which they undertake with their teacher?</i></p> <p><i>2.2 How is an identity as a solo piano student negotiated in the context of teacher-student relationship in relation to other ongoing musical identity projects?</i></p>	<p>Research interviews with ten solo piano students during their studies</p>	<p>Thematic analysis</p>	<p>II Collaboration, Conflict and the Musical Identity Work of Solo Students: The Significance of Student-Teacher Relationship (2004)</p>
<p>3) <u>How do career-young professional pianists talk about and give accounts of their musicianship and careers during their process of transition from study to working life and how do these accounts resource their identity negotiations as working musicians?</u></p> <p><i>3.1 How do career-young professional pianists give accounts of their musicianship in the context of making the transition from studies to working life?</i></p> <p><i>3.2 How do career-young professional pianists' accounts of their musicianship resource their identity negotiations as working musicians in the context of transition from studies to working life?</i></p>	<p>Research interviews with four solo-pianists after their transition to working life</p>	<p>Thematic analysis</p>	<p>III Tracing the Transition from Study to a Contemporary Creative Working Life: The Trajectories of professional Musicians (2012)</p>

## 4 Methods

### 4.1 Studying identity in music

The starting point for the methods used in this study is the socio-cultural framework with the application of qualitative thematic analysis. Even if thematic analysis has perhaps been poorly demarcated (in that it often does not appear to exist as a 'named' analysis in a same way than other methods do e.g. narrative analysis) and rarely acknowledged, it is a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework; hence, it can be used within different theoretical frameworks, in order to do different things. Having theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research approach, providing a rich tool and leading to a detailed, yet complex, account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, illuminating experiences, meanings and the reality of the participants; alternatively, it can be a constructionist method, giving insights into the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on derive from a range of discourses operating within society. In this study, thematic analysis was adopted as a 'contextualist' method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism. It was seen as drawing on theories that acknowledge the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experience, and in turn, the ways in which the broader social context impinges on those meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

One of the key assumptions in this study involved viewing talk and language as constitutive in identity negotiation; here one approaches a broad understanding of discourse analysis as a method that identifies patterns (themes, stories) within data, theorising language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as being social in nature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, identity negotiations and the relation between individual and social aspects of identity were researched by collecting musicians' accounts of their musical histories and experiences, as situated in the daily practices of their study and work. The analytical approach adopted was originally developed by MacDonald and Miell (2002) and by MacDonald et al. (2005). Thus key themes were initially identified, with detailed analysis thereafter focusing on the particular ways in which participants talked about the process of becoming musicians. Within each theme, the detailed analytical work focused on how the students accounted for and used their talk about music, and on their experiences of studying music and the piano; the analysis also covered how the

students actively constructed their musical worlds and themselves within dialogue (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

The accounts collected through the research interviews were seen as reflecting both individual experiences and the broader socio-cultural context. They revealed both personal resources through participants' experiences and meanings and the content of local resources, i.e. 'social' resources; these involved broader assumptions, structures and collective meanings such as ideologies and 'shoulds' (see Taylor & Littleton, 2008).

Individuals' experiences represent the complexity associated with being embedded in a social world. An understanding of the impact of the social experiences of any particular individual cannot be captured except by exploring individual subjective experience. Yet at the same time, the more we examine the individual, the more we may come to understand social phenomena (O'Neill & Green, 2004). In fact, thematic analysis enabled to focus on both personal and local resources in identity work—the resources that culminate in the relationship between the individual and the social in identity negotiation. The individual and the social are in ultimate union, and this makes it necessary to discuss them together.

## **4.2 The context of the study and the participants**

### *Contexts of music education, the academy and transitions*

#### *Music education in Finland*

Music is one of the most popular hobbies amongst school-aged children in Finland, and the music school (leisure activity not connected to comprehensive schools) network is comprehensive and effective. In addition, there is the National 'Junior Academy', which is directed at young, exceptionally gifted music students of school age, and is affiliated to the Sibelius Academy (the only music academy in Finland). The Junior Academy accepts students considered by the board to possess the potential to pursue a professional career in music. As well as music schools that educate children aged 4–18 years, there are altogether 24 colleges and institutions of music in Finland (<http://www2.siba.fi/Kulttuuripalvelut/musiikkioppilaitokset.html>). In these institutions education is organised up to bachelor's degree level.

In Finland the institutionally organised education in classical music (during participants' studies) can be characterised in terms of what Sloboda (1996) has described as the 'classical conservatoire culture'. Definitions of 'good musicianship' are constituted largely within this culture, where the emphasis is on musical artworks within the formal, classical tradition. The focus is on accuracy, the 'faithful' interpretation of a printed score and 'con-



trolled' performance, rather than improvisation or composition. An essential characteristic is the development of a repertoire of extremely technically difficult compositions, and conceptions of mastery are based on the ability to perform works from a small, core set of compositions. Changes within a domain are not adopted unless they are sanctioned by 'gate-keepers' (such as teachers, critics and competition jury members) (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999). Competitive events are an important part of conservatoire culture. In competitions performers are compared directly by experts, on their ability to perform identical or very similar pieces. These judgements form an important element in the assessment of progress. One route towards membership of the established classical music community is participation in both national and international competitions and master-classes. Summer courses are also 'places to be seen'—students 'get to know and be known' and 'keep in touch' with other musicians and Academy teachers.

### *The Sibelius Academy*

The Sibelius Academy is the only music academy in Finland and one of the biggest in Europe. Internationally, it is held in high esteem as an institute of music. Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, the Sibelius Academy maintains a dominant position within Finnish classical music culture. In addition to providing the highest level of education in the field of music, academy staff and students regularly perform and undertake artistic activities and research. The Sibelius Academy is committed to fostering Finland's musical culture and heritage, and various kinds of concerts and festivals are arranged under its auspices. There are over 1500 students at the academy and the yearly intake (master's degree) is approximately 60 students. Students admitted to the academy are entitled to take the degree 'Master of Music' but they may also take a bachelor's degree. The degree programme was, at the time of the first interviews, divided into eight instrumental groups, one of them being piano (for information on the academy and admissions data see: <http://www.siba.fi>). The name and the organisation of departments have changed a number of times since this time.

### *Music studies in the Department of Piano Music*

The Department of Piano Music in the Sibelius Academy, the site being studied here, was designated as a top unit for artistic activity (2001–2003) by the Finnish Ministry of Education. Whilst only approximately ten solo-pianists gain entry to the Sibelius Academy yearly, very few students go on to pursue an international career as a soloist. Thus, there is huge competition and a high

level of skill and ability amongst professional pianists, the majority of who undertake a wide range of professional music work besides solo work.

Music studies within the Department of Piano Music were, during the first interviews, based on the Western classical music tradition and students' achievements were predominantly assessed via a programme of work collected from different classical traditions. Major instrument studies were predominantly organised and focused around solo work within intensive one-to-one private lessons. Personal solo practice also took place in addition to and in preparation for these lessons. Throughout their studies at the academy the students worked with just one teacher, and changing teachers happened only in exceptional circumstances. Whether or not group lessons, peer-critique sessions and other kind of collaborative groups were organised in major instrument studies depended largely on the teachers' own inclinations. Such sessions were not part of the formally recognised degree requirements and curriculum. Students frequently participated in master classes and other courses on a voluntary basis. They also participated in piano competitions. Whilst not required as part of the formal curriculum, students were encouraged to enter these competitions and were supported in their preparation for them. Thus there were students who entered competitions annually for the duration of their academy studies.

### *Context of transition*

In addition to the existing context of the academy, students were during both interview rounds going through a significant transition. At the time of the first interviews participants had passed their entry examination and were entering to the Academy and professional community of musicians. For many of the participants this meant moving to live in Helsinki, commencing studies at the Sibelius Academy and becoming a member of the academy's community. Participants were at a critical moment in their musical careers, as they were in a process of transition in their piano studies where they were actively negotiating their entry to the professional field of music: even though they may successfully complete their master's studies, only a tiny minority will progress beyond this point to become professional solo-pianists. So, particular interest was in this transition process and, in particular, novices' claims to identities both as capable piano students of calibre and as professional solo-pianists. At the time of the second interviews participants had finished their instrumental studies in the academy and had entered professional working life. During this transition, participants were engaged in another critical process in their careers, as they were actively negotiating their identities as pianists and musicians in professional working life. Participants'

claims to these were of particular interest. The interest in transitions was due to them being characterised by intense identity work, involving the (re)alignment and reconciliation of multiple discourses and identity positions (Wetherell, 2006). Novice talk thus constitutes an especially compelling site for looking at how the musical identities of ‘solo-pianist’, ‘academy student’, ‘musicians’, professionals’ are taken up in the course of these transitions.

### *Participants*

The participants were ten solo piano students who were interviewed once during their studies at the Sibelius Academy. Four of these original participants were followed up around eight years after the original interviews. This enabled an investigation of the transition experience, utilising longitudinal data.

#### *First interview*

Ten Finnish classical solo piano students, three men and seven women, aged 18–27 years, were interviewed. At the time of the interview the average age of the interviewees was 23 years. The students were all registered within the Sibelius Academy, Department of Solo Performance. All ten participants were studying on the Sibelius Academy’s master’s programme for piano music (designed for solo performance pianists).

Six of the interviewees had been studying mainly in music schools before they began their studies on the Sibelius Academy’s Masters Program for Piano Music (of these six, three had also studied partly in conservatoires). One of the interviewees had completed a bachelor’s degree in the conservatoire in order to qualify as a teacher. Three of the interviewees had studied at the Sibelius Academy’s Junior Academy for exceptionally talented children. They had started studying at the Junior Academy when they were approximately 10 years old. Prior to the Junior Academy they had been studying in music schools. All interviewees began their ‘formal’ piano lessons when they were approximately 6 years old (between 4 to 11 years). Over the years, all students had worked with a number of different male and female teachers.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and recruitment of participants was achieved through: (1) a call issued by the researcher (asking students in the academy building to participate as well as contacting students listed as solo piano students at the Academy); and (2) prospective interviewees contacting the researcher after hearing about the interview study by ‘word-of-mouth’. All potential participants were assured that their decision to

participate in the research project would not impact adversely on their studies, as the researchers had no institutional affiliation to the Sibelius Academy.

Participants gave informed consent, both for their participation in the research project and the subsequent use of the recorded and transcribed interviews. Confidentiality was assured and participants were informed that their interviews would be used for research purposes only, with the original recordings and associated transcripts being stored in accordance with appropriate data protection procedures. They were also informed that extracts used in publications would be edited to exclude any details that might enable them to be recognised.

### *Second interview*

Participation in the second round of interviews was also voluntary. Six of the original ten participants were not able to take part in the interviews. Three of them were temporarily abroad and unavailable during the follow-up interview period. One declined to be interviewed on account of a busy work schedule and the remaining two could not be traced. At the time of the interviews the four participants who took part in the second interview had all completed their instrumental studies by giving the obligatory diploma concert and were entering professional working life. One participant had only recently entered working life, while three had been working for a few years. Two of the participants were working as teachers in a music school or conservatoire as well as playing chamber music and performing as soloists. In addition to playing chamber music and teaching, two of the interviewees were accompanists and involved in the development of music technology and music education curricula. During their studies at the Sibelius Academy, these four participants had concentrated on solo performance as defined in the degree requirements. Their studies included only a very small number of courses devoted to chamber music, the Lied, and piano pedagogy. Despite the fact that their studies focused on solo performance, these four interviewees reported that they were not currently pursuing a full-time international performance career. Instead they were devoting themselves full-time to national level performing activities as well as a wide range of other music-related professional activities.

## **4.3 The research interviews**

Methodologically, the design of this study was informed, by the qualitative interview approach adopted by Burland and Davidson (2002), Davidson and Burland (2006) and Davidson and Coimbra (2001) who explored the process of becoming a solo performer in the socio-cultural context (see also David-

son, 2002). These socio-culturally oriented studies succeeded in collecting rich and appropriate materials in order to analyse the process of becoming a solo performer. The study undertaken by O'Neill et al. (2002) (see also O'Neill, 2002) focusing on identities in music also represented an initial starting point for considering the potential and value of interview-based work. Secondly, the design of this study was methodologically informed by the study of musicians' career aspirations conducted by Miller and Baker (2007), who used biographically-oriented research interviews as research material. The design of the study has also been influenced by MacNamara et al's (2008) qualitative interview approach to the study of how music students negotiated their transitions from study to working life. The focus of this work was particularly on the role of psychological characteristics of developing excellence in the context of transition. Taylor and Littleton's (2008) interview study of artists and designers also proved influential inspiration in respect of the challenges encountered whilst constructing oneself both as a creative and 'responsible' person in the context of the transition to working life.

Interviews are particular kinds of conversation within which meanings are actively negotiated. They are 'communication situations that are culturally rooted and whose meanings have to be constructed intersubjectively during the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee' (Grossen & Pochon, 1997, p. 269). Furthermore, interviewees' talk is occasioned, being attuned to the particular demands and opportunities of the interview situation (Westcott & Littleton, 2004).

Consequently, I argue (see Taylor & Littleton, 2006) that research interviews can be regarded as attractive and appropriate contexts for novice identity work, which is my interest here.

### *First interviews*

The participants were each interviewed on a one-to-one basis with the interviews lasting between 2 and 4 hours. The participants understood that they were participating in a research project specifically designed to explore people's experiences of learning the piano and studying music. Nine of the interviews were conducted in the academy's practice rooms over the summer holiday period. Only one interview took place at an interviewee's home during semester time.

The interviews were semi-structured and were designed to give students opportunities to talk about their backgrounds and to discuss their experiences associated with learning music. Each interview was based around an interview 'guide' (see Fielding, 1993), whereby the interviewer had a list of key

topics (such as music at home, peer influences, teachers, studies, practising, competitions, performing, the future) that framed the interview process. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interviewer also made impressionistic notes concerning each interview.

Each interview opened with a very general question, explicitly intended to put the participant at ease and to enable them to describe their experiences in their own terms ('Can you tell me about the place of music in your life?'). Each interview was then based around a discussion of key focal topics which the interviewer and interviewee explored freely. The order in which the key topics were discussed was therefore uniquely different for each interviewee, it being contingent upon and emerging from the immediate context of the preceding discussion. This means that the interviewer picked up on and developed particular issues as an interviewee raised them, encouraging them to offer further reflections and provide examples and personal narratives. The interviews were designed to be interviewee-centred, with the interviewer taking a predominantly facilitative role. Thus, the interviewer took a facilitative role, picking up issues raised by each interviewee, encouraging them to provide examples from their own experiences and each student to feel able to talk freely, allowing space for reflection and revision of their views. Through their elaboration (or not) the interviewees thus dictated which items were discussed in-depth and which received less attention. The interviewer used predominantly open questions, such as: 'How did you get into the academy?'; 'Tell me about your first term in the academy?'; 'Could you say something about how you practise?'; 'For you, what is the most difficult thing about playing the piano?' Where appropriate, the interviewees' responses were followed up with additional prompts such as: 'Could you say a bit more about that?'; 'How did you feel about that?'

### *Second interviews*

The data were collected through semi-structured research interviews in which participants were given the opportunity to talk about their transition from study to working life. The interviews began with a short shared retrospection concerning the interviewee's situation and future visions (e.g. '*Can you remember your situation at the time of the first interview?*', '*You said that...*' etc.), at the time of the first interview, while they were still studying. The interviewer also re-capped some of the interviewees' general orientations to the key topics discussed during the interview as well as their visions and hopes for the future at that time. This initial phase of the interviews was designed to put the interviewees at ease, to enable them subsequently to describe their experiences in their own terms as well as refresh their memory. In

this respect the interviews were also planned to be biographically oriented. Following this review the interviewee was encouraged to speak freely about their journey (from the time of first interview, to their circumstances at the time of the follow-up interview. The interviewer aimed *both to give them space to talk and encourage them in their telling* (e.g. *‘That sounds interesting’ etc.*). Each interview was based on an interview guide with key topics specifying themes to be covered during the interview (see Patton, 2002; Fielding, 1993). Two broad topics of significance in respect to the focus of this study were ‘completion of studies’ and ‘the transition to working life’. Each interview was conducted so that the participant could freely talk about their experiences regarding their transition from their studies to working life. The interviews were also designed to allow space for reflection and opportunities for revision of personal accounts and narratives. The interview situations were thus designed to function as conversations within which meanings were constructed via the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (see Grossen & Pochon, 1997). The result was a: ‘joint product, shaped and organised by asking and answering questions’ (Mishler, 1986). The interviewer played a facilitative role—picking up issues raised during the interview and by asking additional questions related to those issues (*Would you tell more about that? etc.*). Additional prompting questions were also asked in order to obtain additional information about a certain event or to advance the account through time. Based on discussions arising from each interviewee’s accounts and descriptions, a chronological record of the interviewee’s transition from study to working life was obtained and explored.

Two of the interviews were conducted in the interviewer’s office in a university building, one took place at the interviewee’s work place (in a silent practising room) and one was undertaken in a conference room near the interviewee’s summer cottage. Interviews lasted approximately 2–4 hours and were conducted on a one-to-one basis.

#### **4.4 Analysis**

As mentioned earlier, the analytical approach adopted was originally used by MacDonald and Miell (2002) and by MacDonald and colleagues (2005). This approach involved the initial identification of key emergent themes, with detailed analysis focusing on (i) the ways in which participants accounted for and narrated their process of transition to their studies in the Sibelius Academy, and from study to working life; (ii) in line with MacDonald and colleagues (2005, p. 324), the ways in which ‘the participants’ talk about their involvement in musical activities and constructed and maintained particular

musical identities'. The interviews were analysed as a single body of data, and the units of analysis were themes.

The detailed analysis was conducted via a modification of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. The analytical phases were as follows: (i) familiarising myself with the data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (vi) writing the report. The analysis was not a linear process of simply moving from one phase to the next, but rather a recursive process requiring movement back and forth throughout the phases (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The first phase, of becoming familiar with the data, included audio-recording and transcribing each interview verbatim. The data were transcribed at an appropriate level of detail and were checked against the recording for accuracy. The transcripts included non-verbal utterances that had a communicative function (see Wooffitt, 2001). The resulting transcripts were thus fairly detailed; they included, for example, words spoken emphatically, hesitations, lengthy pauses and some non-word utterances such as 'mm', 'um', and 'ooh', when these were judged to have a communicative function. In the extracts reproduced in this thesis, hesitations and lengthy pauses are indicated by square brackets and words spoken emphatically are in italics. Omissions are indicated by three hyphens, and short untimed pauses and breaks by three dots. In order to ensure anonymity, participants have been given pseudonyms and any material that would identify them has been removed from the transcript.

The analytical process began with immersion in the recordings. The initial phase involved listening and re-listening to the recordings in conjunction with close reading and re-reading of the transcripts. I sought to make the transcriptions as detailed and authentic as possible in order to allow transparency and access to the data on which analysis was based (Nikander, 2008). In the course of studying the transcripts, I wrote detailed notes on their content to assist this process.

Thereafter, in the second phase of generating initial codes I used manual methods. This involved recognising potential patterns and identifying segments of interview materials. I used highlighters, coloured pens and post-it notes, and organised the materials on a word processor through cutting and pasting. It was important to make sure that each data item was given equal attention in the coding process.

Inductive 'bottom up' analysis involves coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or into the researcher's analytical pre-conceptions. Using this method, I sought to ensure that the thematic analysis



in this study was data driven. However, researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the present study, this meant that the themes could not be said to emerge purely from the interview materials, considered in isolation. As Braun and Clarke (2006) have pointed out, the researcher plays an active role in the process of analysis, and this role involves epistemological commitments and broader theoretical assumptions. Braun and Clarke further note that a lack of clear guidelines around thematic analysis will tend to support the criticism sometimes levelled at qualitative research—that it pursues an ‘anything goes’ methodology. In fact, any procedure that relied purely on themes ‘emerging’ or being ‘discovered’ would be a passive analytical process; it would deny or distort the active role of the researcher who always plays a role in identifying patterns/themes, selecting those of interest, and reporting them (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the third phase, I searched for themes by sorting different codes into potential themes. The main focus in this phase was to check that the coding process was thorough, inclusive and comprehensive, and that themes were not generated from only a few examples. Thus, I collated all the relevant extracts for each theme.

Using mind maps assisted me in thinking about the discernible relationships (in terms of codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes), and in general in organising the codes into themes. This work laid the foundation for the fourth phase, of reviewing the themes. In order to refine and review the themes I checked the themes against each other and in relation to the original data set as a whole.

As the amount of data available for analysis was substantial, the analytical approach used here, following Frosh and colleagues (2002), was to take sweeps and ‘cuts’ through the material. These were guided and informed by relevant theoretical concerns, and by the key themes from the interviews themselves. In practice, this involved identifying an issue for detailed exploration and then extracting all material salient to this issue from each of the interviewees. It was through this detailed analytical work that the themes emerging from the initial readings of the material were refined and checked against the data from each interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Through this process a number of key themes gradually assumed prominence.

After a careful review of the themes in the light of research questions and theoretical considerations, the most salient for further detailed analysis were then selected during the fifth phase, i.e. the phase of defining and naming

themes. The initial themes were organised into meaningful groups in accordance with the ideas that were identified.

Within each theme, the detailed analytical work focused on how the students were using their talk (about music and their experiences of studying music, the piano, and their transitions to study and working life) to actively construct their musical worlds and themselves within dialogue (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The extracts reproduced here from the participants' talk are illustrative. They were selected as examples of points and broader patterns that were detected in the general analysis, or as contrastive cases. Through detailed analytical work I sought to ensure that the data were analysed and interpreted rather than just paraphrased or described. Furthermore, it was necessary to check that the extracts did indeed illustrate the claims arising from the analysis.

For each individual theme, I had to conduct and write down a detailed analysis. As well as identifying the story that each theme told, it was important to consider how it fitted into the broader overall story that was to be told about the materials (ensuring that there was not too much overlap between themes). The extracts had to be embedded within an analytical narrative, one that compellingly exemplified the story discernible from the materials; furthermore, the analytical narrative had to go beyond mere description of the materials and make an argument in relation to the research questions (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The themes were given their present form through the writing of reports (i.e. the articles). Within the articles, the analyses of both the themes and the individual extracts were set out in such a way that they could be consulted in detail within the Results sections of the articles.

### *Translations*

The extracts were translated from Finnish into English by the researchers, and these translations were checked and further refined by a bilingual Finnish/English specialist (in music psychology or in language). Further refinements were made to the translations of the extracts in order to address issues of clarity and expression raised by the reviewers of the articles. The extracts were chosen as exemplifications of some key patterns that emerged across the data (excluding examples that were not as succinct or as readily quotable).

The translation of the data extracts was not a process of mechanically following some transcription technique; rather, it involved a range of practical and ideological issues concerning the level of detail to be chosen in the transcriptions, and the ways in which the translations could best be presented in a published study (Nikander, 2008). One of the challenges was the translation

of expressions that have no established counterparts in the translated language, English. Of course, the process of transcription is always a representational one and, as Kleine Staarman (2009, p. 132) notes, the translation of material is not transparent: 'idiomatic meanings are difficult to translate, even for native speakers of both languages'. Hence, the process of translation will inevitably involve subtle shifts in meaning. As Nikander (2006) points out, the result of a transcription is always a non-mechanically produced or determined product; thus it can hardly be straightforwardly judged as being correct or incorrect.



## 5 Results

This chapter summarises the main findings of the three studies on solo-pianists' identity negotiations. On the basis of results obtained and recent literature in the area, it also reflects on and seeks to redefine the phenomena under examination. Table 2 presents a summary of the main findings of the studies. Finally, Section 5.5 presents concluding themes connecting the three studies.

### 5.1 Musical identities in transition: solo-piano students' accounts of entering the academy

As described in Chapter 3, the first phase of the research focused on the identity work of adult instrumental students who were negotiating their entry to a prestigious music academy and to music as a profession. The particular interest was in this transition process, and to novices' claims to identities both as capable piano students of calibre and as professional solo-pianists. Ten classical solo-piano students' accounts of their musical histories and experiences were collected through research interviews. The analysis of the interviews, with relevant quotations, is presented in more detail in Article I.

The analysis explored how comparative talk concerning the self and others resourced the musical identity work of the students. The exploration was conducted in terms of three key themes: (1) entering the academy, (2) participation in the practices of the academy, and (3) the lives of others—life-courses and trajectories.

#### *Theme 1*

Theme 1 encompassed the significance of entrance tests and the early experiences of being in the academy. The focus was on how these aspects came to be harnessed discursively in students' identity work.

#### *Entrance tests*

The entrance tests seemed to be amongst the first resources that the students drew upon to make sense of their proficiency and calibre in respect of their peer group. The students' accounts of their admission to the academy were characterised by detailed reflections on the results of the formal entrance tests. The publicly available rank ordering of candidates does not merely constitute an official, institutionally sanctioned statement concerning the

outcome of a particular competitive assessment. Rather, the listing becomes harnessed discursively as a powerful resource for framing the construction within students' talk of comparisons and relations between the students, with each individual taking account of his/her own positioning in relation to peers. The results of the entrance tests were re-contextualised within narratives of comparison and competition. The students' accounts of their own proficiency and positioning as solo-piano students of calibre constituted a relational accomplishment, observed through the inextricable linking within the accounts of the results of the formal entry assessment, including the ranking vis-à-vis peers. Interest in and sensitivity to the performance and achievements of others seemed to be further heightened as the students described the process of adjusting to life as a solo-piano student within the academy.

### *Early experiences*

The challenges implicated in the students' earliest experiences of academy life seemed to be amongst the most salient features of their intense musical identity work. During their transition into the life and work of the academy, students' identities as pianists of calibre were often in a state of intense flux. Many participants spoke of the emotion-laden experience of no longer being exceptional or special, and the associated difficulties of being just one amongst many other talented pianists. The accounts of early experiences of being in the academy encapsulated the strong emotions of insecurity and self-doubt, experienced during the initial period of flux and transition. These accounts of uncertainty and change pointed to 'trouble' for students' in terms of their identities as pianists of calibre, with threats to their positioning as students at the academy. Thus the period of initial elation at gaining acceptance was followed by a stark and at times dramatic re-appraisal of one's competencies, status and identity as a pianist and student of caliber. Students' stories and accounts frequently cohered around the emergent dynamic of disequilibrium. The students' immediate community of peers seemed not to be a static one and the students themselves acknowledged this in their accounts. They constructed in their talk a dynamic process in which they discursively repositioned themselves and reappraised their calibre, orienting themselves to the challenges posed by the admission of new students.

### *Theme 2*

Theme 2 was bound up with students' accounts of their participation in and engagement with the musical practices of the academy. Here there was an emphasis on the significance of perceived norms and expectations, excep-

tionality and the experience of listening to others. The students' accounts indicated that they soon become immersed in the musical practices and routines of the academy, which included practising, rehearsing and listening to others play. In their talk, students oriented themselves to the 'norms' and 'shoulds' aligned with these practices, and also to certain exceptions that applied.

*'Norms' and 'shoulds' related to practising one's instrument*

The students' discursive orientation concerning practising was potentially a source of 'trouble' in their identity work. Whilst they did not want to position themselves as achieving results through endless work and practice, the students oriented themselves in their accounts to prevailing understandings regarding the appropriate 'norms' that a pianist ought to adhere to in order to be 'respectable'. Students problematised their personal experiences of practising, and they were acutely aware of and oriented to the 'norms' heard. They also *talked against* these 'norms'. For example, students' characterisation of always feeling inadequate did not emerge through a comparative, relational process involving reference to peers rather it emerged in relation to a hypothetical notion of what should or ought to be done by every pianist, causing 'trouble' regarding claims to an identity as a 'respectable' pianist. The students' orientation to the 'norms' and 'shoulds' highlighted a challenging dialectic between, on the one hand, their own experiences and on the other hand, accounts aligned with prevailing expectations and cultural norms.

*Talk of criteria for superiority and capability (exceptionality)*

The processes involved in the negotiation of identity, both as a solo-pianist and as a student of the academy, are inextricably bound up with dichotomous accounts of learning through (i) 'practising and hard work' versus (ii) 'naturalness and giftedness'. Notions of God-given gifts were frequently mentioned by the students, with high-quality playing being construed as somehow arising 'miraculously', rather than being 'calculated'. With this kind of talk, a student sets criteria for superiority and capability that posed dilemmas and challenges to one's identity as a quality pianist. The students constructed in their talk the notion of a pianist of calibre through a comparative process in which calibre emerges as something almost mystical and unattainable.

*Listening and fear of being overheard*

Listening, particularly to the playing of other students, was construed as a relational musical practice of significance. It was construed in the interviews

as a process within and through which novices ascertain the calibre of the playing amongst their peer group. Students considered their own strengths and weaknesses as pianists, and appraised their quality of the pieces they tackled vis-à-vis their peers. Furthermore, the fear of being overheard by someone else whilst practising poses potential challenges for students' identities as proficient solo-pianists of calibre. The analyses suggest that rather than being construed positively as a site for exploration and learning, the practice of practising was construed here as laden with fear and anxieties. The students' appeal to prevailing norms concerning the nature and duration of practice and their fears of being overheard, are typical of the narratives of comparison that emerged throughout these accounts. Rather than being an endeavour undertaken by an individual in private, practice was constructed as a fundamentally relational activity, implicated in identity work and in claims to being a 'respectable' pianist. Through their accounts of personal practice in relation to norms that were subjected to (amongst other things) the imagined scrutiny of peers, practice became discursively constituted as a 'performance' of significance and consequence for one's identity as a solo-pianist, with the practice room effectively becoming a performance venue.

### ***Theme 3***

Theme 3 focused on the participants' accounts of life-courses and trajectories and in particular the 'typical' trajectories of successful academy students and solo-pianists of calibre.

#### *Notions of typical life-courses and trajectories*

Notions of typical life-courses or trajectories had a crucial role in resourcing the students' musical identity work. The students constructed detailed accounts of the typical life trajectories and training of 'many' academy students. Such notions bore the imprints not only of individuals' interpersonal relations, but also the cultural and historical weight of the Sibelius Academy. The students used talk to construct a notion of 'others', and of the kind of life-courses needed if one was to thrive within the academy as an institution (see Holland et al., 1998). This life-course notion became implicated in their own identity work. Often the characterisation of these trajectories was juxtaposed to a suggestion that the individual's own experience/trajectory was not in accordance with the experience of the major. The constructions of successful/elite students were reminiscent of Holland and colleagues' (1998) notion of figured worlds, viewed in part as historically and culturally constituted models, and constituting important tools for identity construction. These



models of a successful group or an elite pose dilemmas for students when they are confronted with challenges to their own narratives.

All in all, one can say that culturally-constituted notions concerning the 'shape of a life' and of typical life trajectories for successful academy students and pianists-of-calibre resourced students' accounts, and were implicated in conversational contexts in ways that supported their on-going identity work at the time (see Holland et al., 1998). Historically and culturally constituted versions of typical life courses constituted certain 'paradigmatic trajectories' (see Wenger, 1998, p. 156), and these defined some of the possibilities for novices. It can be said that such paradigmatic trajectories emerged as one of the most influential resources shaping students' identity work. In many instances students' own life trajectories were potentially troubled in relation to these paradigmatic trajectories.

### ***Results relating to themes 1-3***

Looking generally at the results relating to themes 1–3, it seems that identity work is always inflected with and coloured by social meanings; moreover, as Wilson and MacDonald (2005, p. 343) have noted, 'musical identities are inextricably linked to a social and cultural milieu that is constantly evolving'. In the face of such evolution and change, once again the results have an impact on the students' accounts of what it means to be a good or talented pianist and student of calibre within the academy.

The analyses suggested that the comparative dynamics between the self and others are key mediators of students' musical identity work. This aspect emphasises the ways in which identity negotiation is an agentic process, but nevertheless one that is collectively shaped and anchored in social relations, communal experiences and interaction—with identities being conferred, and at the same time, actively claimed and contested. The interpretations presented in the results were offered as situated explorations of the ways in which musical identity work combines the personal with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations.

It was interesting to observe how frequently the students who were interviewed were self-deprecating and highly self-critical. Of course this might reflect a prevailing Finnish cultural norm—that one should be modest and not present oneself as superior to others. But it is perhaps also indicative of the nature of the academy study experience. The study process is explicitly designed to encourage constructive and critical reflection on one's musical practices, understandings and ways of working, with possible reconfiguration of all of these. If one recognises that the construction of practices, understandings and subjectivities are inextricably interwoven during an intense

process of critical reflection and transformation of practice, this has consequences for the nature and form of one's identity work. Such an intense process of transition, plus the associated reconfiguration of artistic practice, is likely to be associated with a reworking and reconfiguration of narratives of the self, and to be highly emotionally charged.

## **5.2 Collaboration, conflict and the musical identity work of solo-piano students: the significance of the student-teacher relationship**

After the process of becoming academy students, participants continue with the processes of becoming solo-pianists and being an academy student. A core aspect in the negotiation of a soloist identity is the interpretation of key pieces in the canon, which are learnt with the help of a teacher. As described in Chapter 3 the aim of the second phase of the research project was to look at the significance of the student-teacher relationship in the musical identity work of solo-piano students. The particular focus was on creating one's interpretation of music pieces, plus the negotiation of other identity projects, in addition to one's identity purely 'as a soloist'. The analysis of the interviews, including quotations, is presented in more detail in Article II.

As Moran and John-Steiner (2004) argue, social interaction involves two or more people talking or in exchange, cooperation adds the constraint of shared purpose, and working together often provides coordination of effort. Collaboration is, however, held to be of a higher standard for it involves 'an affair of the mind'. Collaboration involves 'an intricate blending of skills, temperaments, effort and sometimes personalities to realise a shared vision of something new and useful' (Moran & John-Steiner, 2004, p. 11).

Teachers often work in a directive, didactic mode. However, with more advanced students, such as those participating in this research, there is evidence that at times the teacher-student relationship can be truly characterised as creative collaboration. The evidence of creative collaboration lies in collective and collaboratively constructed interpretations of pieces of music.

In this study, the focus was solely on the significance of the student-teacher relationship for the identity of students. The analyses were aimed at making sense of the identity work inherent in the complex processes involved in the collaborative construction of interpretations, the struggle between accepted interpretations and personal creativity and engagement with other musical genres. Three particular themes demonstrating the negotiation and re-negotiation of identity as a soloist: (1) collective and collaboratively constructed interpretations, (2) the struggle between personally meaningful,

creative interpretations and accepted interpretations, and (3) other musical genres and other musical identity projects.

### ***Theme 1***

#### *Collective and collaboratively constructed interpretations (conventions framing and mediating interpretative work)*

The process of interpretation emerged within this theme as an interweaving of tradition—as represented and mediated through the guidance of the teacher—with the students’ own creative interpretations. Interpretation was characterised as involving subtle negotiation, and the joint construction of and agreement on shared meaning and understanding. Conventions, or particular ways of playing, were not unthinkingly reproduced. Rather, they were appropriated, becoming part of one’s own understanding, and framing and mediating interpretative work. A collegial and collaborative approach to interpretation, and the associated understanding that came with it, fostered professional growth and enhanced artistic confidence.

Collaborative approaches to interpretation were often characterised as involving forms of musical communication, in which ideas regarding interpretations were shared and mediated through music. However, the teachers’ playing was not undertaken to demonstrate a rendition of a piece to be copied or emulated. Rather it was intended to provide ‘inspiration’ for the students’ own interpretative work. Music was thus the medium within which the interdependent processes of creative interpretation and identity construction were mutually constituted.

### ***Theme 2***

#### *The struggle between personally meaningful, creative interpretations and accepted interpretations (struggle and conflict, the risk of adopting a troubled identity)*

Theme 1 highlighted that there is potential for an empowering reconciliation of the innovative and the traditional within interpretative acts and processes. However, theme 2 emphasised the struggle and conflict inherent in interpretation, and the difficulty—but necessity—of successfully negotiating one’s identity as a soloist within an established social milieu. Theme 2 concerned the struggle between the students’ individual creative interpretation of a piece and the teacher’s sanctioning of this with respect to an (often implicitly) accepted interpretation within the wider musical community. Interpretation emerged here as a highly contested achievement, in which students were expected to comply with the tutor’s guidance. The students’ struggle to inter-

pret and construct their responses to a piece was crucially framed and constrained by the comments of the teacher; here the teacher represents someone who is acutely aware of the constraints imposed by the wider musical culture, and in particular, the expectations associated with the adjudication process on the ‘competition circuit’. The struggle to create meaning was regularly contested within routine rehearsal and practice. It could be said that one’s identity as a creative soloist was contested in an uncomfortable dynamic, in which the teacher’s stance was one of power. One’s own creative interpretations might well be in direct conflict with the guidance being given by the teacher, given that the teacher is working with the student within a framework afforded by a particular system of assessment, carrying the weight of historical tradition, and oriented to the forms of expression valued by an established classical music community. To adhere unquestioningly to these valued forms of expression is considered to be dishonest, and it creates a situation in which, if one unquestioningly follows an existing interpretation, one runs the risk of taking on a troubled identity. The struggle to reconcile tradition with the telling of one’s own story also has tangible consequences for performance. Attempts to play in accordance with all advices and expectations can lead to a situation in which one’s own story is lost; the performer may feel that his/her performance ‘crashes’ for that very reason. That may become a risk to one’s professional identity and identity as a creative performer. The data also demonstrated how young pianists seemed to have a ‘holistic’ notion, of life and playing as interconnected and reciprocally influencing one another. One could discern tensions between interpretations of what is personally meaningful for the student and what is acceptable to or expected by the teacher.

### ***Theme 3***

#### *Other musical genres and other musical identity projects*

Theme 3 was bound up with the multifaceted nature of identity negotiation. The analyses highlighted the management of multiple musical identity projects, in this case managing one’s identity as a classical solo-pianist, a folk musician and a band member. The study showed that students may encounter situations in which they face an uncomfortable dynamic in managing all these identities. Being a serious solo piano student within the academy will require total dedication and commitment. Playing folk music in a band seemed involve the potential risk of causing a troubled identity, with the student resisting the identity of someone who is not serious or dedicated to a single identity. In some circumstances the reactions of the teacher—as envisaged by the

student—and the associated risk of troubled identity positions problematised students' engagement with other music genres, especially popular forms of music-making.

The analysis showed how one student created a strategy for preserving both identities. The student retained his/her own interest by not telling the teacher about a project in folk music, but nevertheless fulfilling the teacher's expectations. Managing multiple identities means managing (for example) two identities—one that is accepted and valued by the teacher, and one arising from other musical interests. The students talked about commitment and dedication when they explained their relation to their own musical interests, such as playing in a folk band. Commitment and dedication are seen as core elements in negotiating the identity of a solo piano student. Students thus used the commitment and dedication in their attempts to negotiate their identities as solo piano students as they did in dealing with identities related to other musical interests. The student with both solo and band participation avoided a potentially problematic identity position by choosing not to disclose his/her involvement with the band to key people, notably his teacher. Nevertheless, one could see the lines of stress that were present here, with the student having to conduct a process of resisting an unwanted and undesirable identity-position. This student was attempting to manage, reconcile and negotiate a potential clash of cultured worlds, caused by his engagement in musical practices associated with both 'high' and 'popular' culture.

### ***Results relating to themes 1-3***

Taken together, the three themes mentioned above demonstrate how the students' developing interpretations of key pieces, and the student-teacher interactions regarding those interpretations, constituted crucial sites within which a student's identity as a soloist was negotiated and re-negotiated. At times the students and teachers worked together to create an interpretation that was something qualitatively different to previous interpretations yet still appropriate and where these processes are implicated in identity work. But overall, the processes undergone highlight both positive and problematic identity positions, emerging in the creative relationship between teacher and student, in which visions and insights are not necessarily shared.

It appeared that through their tutoring, evaluations and sanctioning of particular interpretations with respect to convention, teachers are crucial mediators of students' 'identity projects', i.e. projects that involve the reconciliation of tradition with personal aspirations, style and creativity. The process of negotiating a solo-pianist's identity thus emerges as a complex event, mediated by communication that is socially, culturally and historically situ-

ated (Wertch, 1991). Within this event, in the course of the studies, the teacher represents and mediates the voice of an official educational institution and the established traditions of the music culture (Bakhtin, 1986).

The analyses conducted in this study exemplify how in some circumstances the (envisaged) reactions of the teacher, with the associated risk of troubled identity positions, problematised students' engagement with popular forms of music-making. Furthermore, it became clear that the creation of novel interpretations of pieces from the canon forms a central aspect of personal musical identity, and constitutes a socially and culturally situated act. To interpret creatively in relation to the parameters afforded by culturally mediated and legitimated conventions is to position oneself as a skilled solo-pianist, and as belonging to the community of classical musicians'.

The results highlighted the difficulties of having multiple and plural musical identities at the same time, subject to diverse needs and expectations. The results also illustrated the multiplicity of the students' identity projects. Here one should bear in mind that those 'other' musical identities and identity projects—undertaken in addition to constructing an identity as a soloist—may be highly meaningful in a personal sense. Furthermore, the results highlight the relational and situated nature of identity: they show how appropriate contexts and relations are chosen for certain identities, and how the negotiation of multiple identities may be managed. This exemplifies the importance of the choice of context—there are contexts which support certain kinds of talk, and certain identities. Note in this connection that the teacher-student relationship is just one context in which a student's identity as a soloist is negotiated.

All in all, the creation of individual interpretations emerges as one of the core competencies for a professional pianist. It forms a central aspect of pianists' personal musical identity, as it marks their playing out as being distinctive, and underpins any potential professional career as a soloist. Interpretation can, in fact, be seen as an inherently creative process. Whilst creativity has traditionally been characterised in terms of individually-based processes, it is as much a cultural and social event as a psychological one (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999). The creation of a novel interpretation of a piece from the canon (the piece in its the actual notation, including indications/words/phrases indicating changes in dynamics, together with generally available knowledge of musical eras, knowledge of composers' styles and of current conventions, and so on) cannot be seen solely as an individual product. It is also as a socially and culturally constituted and situated act, in which received wisdom, convention and prior interpretations are mobilised and combined with aspects of personal style and preference to inform judgments relat-

ing to individuals' musical products. Conceptualising this form of creativity as a social event thus establishes a dialectic between the individual soloist and the established practices and cultural traditions of a particular musical community. A skilful solo-pianist should be able to connect with particular established musical traditions and conventions, whilst also building on this to offer his/her unique interpretation of a particular piece. Inherent in the negotiated and often contested processes of interpretation are the similarly complex social processes of identity construction. To interpret creatively in relation to the parameters afforded by culturally mediated and legitimated conventions is to position oneself as a skilled solo-pianist and as a member of the established classical music community.

### **5.3 Tracing the transition from study to a creative working life: the creative trajectories of professional musicians**

The findings from studies I and II left many questions open about becoming a musician, and about what may happen during the transition to the working life. The purpose of Study III was to explore career-young professional pianists' talk about the process of making the transition from study to working life. This study focused on two key themes: (1) 'Musicianship: one's own playing in transition' and (2) 'Situating oneself as a working musician anew'. Theme 1 focused on how career-young professional musicians characterise the significance of the transition from study to working life for their development as musicians and pianists. Theme 2 considered the negotiation of multiple identities as working musicians, and how one may situate one's musicianship in the wider life context beyond the academy. Both themes were concerned with how musicians oriented themselves to the multiple and diverse influences that confront them in their transition from studies to working life, and further, in their changing practices and trajectories as musicians.

#### ***Theme 1***

##### ***Musicianship: one's own playing in transition***

The participants had quite recently completed a lengthy period of formal study. Their accounts exemplified the salience of their experience of leaving the Sibelius Academy and moving into professional working life. Thus, it was appropriate to examine the (re)negotiation of their professional identities and their trajectories as musicians at this point. The transition from the academy to working life seemed to be propitious for re-assessing one's path as a musician. The transition period shaped intense identity work round one's own playing and musicianship.

The analyses indicated that the musicians had different orientations vis-à-vis their experiences while maturing as a musician and becoming independent from the academy. Throughout, the participants spoke of finding their own way and their own voice. The desire to move away from or rid oneself of something, while orienting oneself toward new influences and ways, seemed to lead students to reflect actively on their learning processes, and to become active agents in defining themselves as professional musicians. The emergence of agency came through particularly strongly in their accounts.

Here, it was possible to observe the use of the students' inner resources in terms of attempts to listen to their own 'voice' and their own thoughts, and to make their own decisions in the process of becoming professional musicians. The process involved presenting oneself as mature, multi-faceted and creative as a musician. This was construed as representing great progress in participants' pathways of musicianship.

Becoming agentic in constructing one's musicianship was supported by 'meaningful others'—persons who did not concur with the conventions within the academy. Getting rid of or becoming independent did not in fact mean isolation; rather, it was a matter of finding new communities and supportive others.

The analyses explicated speakers' efforts to reconcile their own biographical accounts with traditionally shared norms and expectations (see also Juuti & Littleton, 2010). By redefining their relationships and paths as musicians, the students oriented themselves toward changed ways of seeing themselves as professional musicians.

## ***Theme 2***

### *Situating oneself as a working musician anew*

The transition from study to working life seemed to have been accompanied by a transformation of participants' expectations of professional musical life. It was clear that the transition to working life was leading them to create new narratives that embraced and privileged their own individual, unique and multiple trajectories. Within this context of change, multiple, plural and creative pathways were highlighted; these formed part of the process of re-defining and re-constructing one's identity as an agentic professional musician.

Acceptance of, preparation for and talking about a more holistic career underscored the significance of following one's individual needs, with appropriate creative paths and trajectories—these forming an alternative to fixed paths, communal expectations and 'shoulds'. Career-young professional



musicians used the resource of realism and interest as a way of legitimating their own diverse ways of music-making, and their choices in respect of a balanced, holistic lifestyle. Such realism entailed 'double-life' commitments (such as teaching and solo work at the same time)—taken on in order to earn money, but also positively desired.

### ***Results relating to themes 1-2***

The study showed how a musician's identity is (re-)negotiated for many purposes, in this case especially for individual life purposes. As Wenger (1998) argues, professional identity is a dynamic relationship between life spheres rather than an isolated phenomenon that takes place only in the educational system or in the work context (see also Nyström, 2009). For Wenger (1998), identity is not a solid core; rather, it comprises different parts that can all be seen in the nexus of multimembership. Thus, the definition of identity is neither unitary nor fragmentary. Wenger claims that in a nexus, multiple trajectories become part of each other, whether they clash or reinforce one another. They are at the same time one and multiple (Wenger, 1998).

Educated solo-pianists emerged here as flexible and committed musicians. The musicians in this study clearly positioned themselves as accomplished novices (see Bransford & Brown, 2000), whose identity negotiations were based on being ready for diverse opportunities, playing with new chamber music groups, teaching, and even taking up new instruments if that was what was needed in order to go forward and negotiate one's identity as a realistic person, holistic and in balance (see also Mills, 2004a, 2004b). Thus, their expertise was not based on specific subject matter or on restricting oneself to a single position.

To sum up, the analytic work undertaken as part of this study suggests that the transition musicians make from study to working life requires them to *redefine their accounts of their emergence as professional musicians*. The reconstruction of their accounts and trajectories during this transition means retrospectively re-situating their prior study experiences and narrations. This necessitates a situated account of their musicianship in respect of their own playing, and also in respect of their present and future career aspirations as working musicians.

## 5.4 Summarising the research process and findings

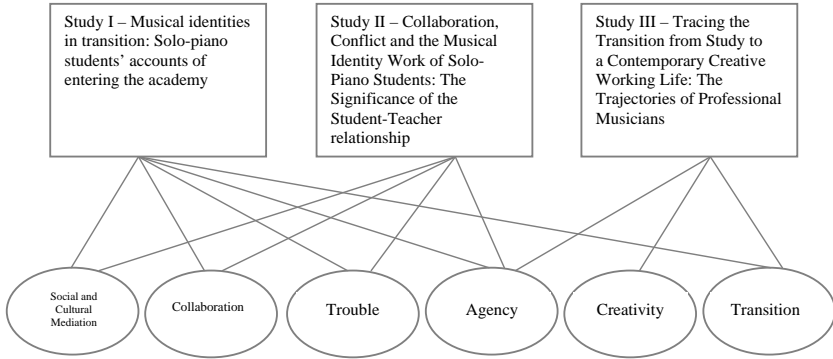
**Table 2.** Summary of the main findings

<b>Musical identities in transition: Solo-piano students’ accounts of entering the academy</b>  <b>(Study I)</b>	<b>Collaboration, Conflict and the Musical Identity Work on Solo Students: The Significance of the Student-Teacher Relation- ship</b>  <b>(Study II)</b>	<b>Tracing the Transition from Study to a Contem- porary Creative Working Life: The Trajectories of Profes- sional Musicians</b>  <b>(Study III)</b>
1) Identity work inflected with social meanings	1) Student-teacher interactions as crucial sites for identity negotiation	1) Transition enabling intense identity work
2) Comparative dynamics are key mediators of identity work	2) Teachers as crucial mediators of students’ identity projects	2) Using inner resources
3) Identity negotiation as an agentic process	3) Risk of troubled identity positions	3) Active agency and the importance of supportive others
4) Identity negotiation as mediated process	4) Difficulties in having multiple and plural identities – ‘talking against’	4) Maturity, multiplicity and creativity in musicianship
	5) Relational and situated nature of identity	5) Reconciliation of one’s own biographical accounts with norms and expectations
		6) New individual narratives and creative trajectories
		7) Identity as realistic and holistic
		8) Flexible and committed musicians

## 5.5 Drawing themes together: the characteristics of solo-pianists’ identity work

The following sub-sections will attempt to draw conclusions connecting the three different studies on solo-pianists’ identity work, encompassing the first transition, to becoming a student, and the later transition to working life. From the findings of the studies one can identify two qualitatively different processes in becoming a professional musician, one intertwined with the

troubles and challenges experienced along the way, and one linked to finding creative and multiple ways of achieving a professional identity. The following pages will address central notions in redefining musicians' identity work, with a special focus on these two different processes.



**Figure 1.** Main concepts connecting Studies I–III

### 5.5.1 Mediation and collaboration

The results (especially those from Study II) indicated that mediation by teachers is one of the most influential processes in inflecting and colouring identity work, especially for a solo performer. The process of negotiating a solo-pianist's identity is a complex trajectory, mediated by communication that is socially, culturally and historically situated. Within this trajectory the teacher represents and mediates the voice of an official education institution, with its established music culture traditions. The teacher thus has an important role to play in inducting the student into the expectations and practices of the established classical music community, and the appropriation of such practices is clearly part of a solo-pianist's training. Furthermore, the creation of new interpretations of music from an established canon is itself a socially and culturally mediated creative process. In the negotiated and contested process of interpreting musical pieces one can identify complex socio-cultural processes of identity construction.

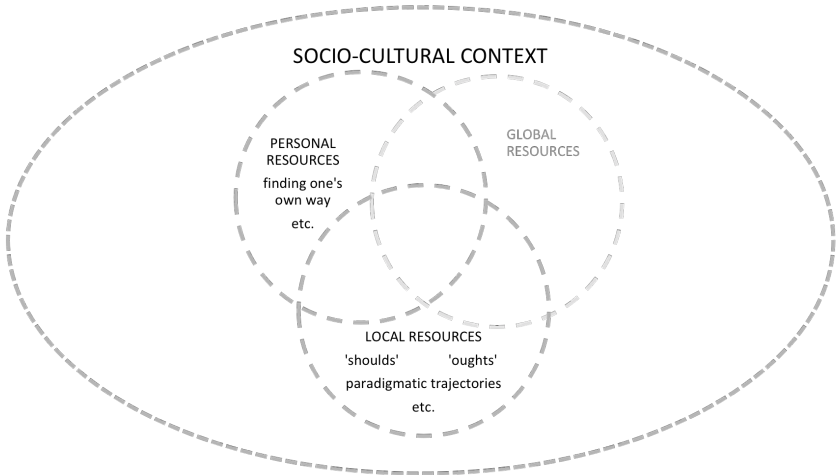
Altogether, one can say that relationships with teachers are powerful sites within which the processes of establishing mutual understanding, constructing interpretations, and conducting identity work are inextricably interwoven. At times, the process of teaching and learning may involve the joint construction of interpretation. Through sharing, discussing and evaluating ideas, and by talking and playing together, the student and his/her teacher participate in

creative collaboration, the process of which has significance both for the emergent interpretation and for the student's identity as a soloist. At its best, communication and collaboration between the teacher and student in the construction of creative interpretations enabled a remarkable increase in artistic confidence and professional growth.

Nevertheless, teacher-learner interactions are not mere interpersonal relationships. They are mediated by institutions which have legitimacy in determining which bodies of knowledge should be taught, according to which curriculum, with what methods, for what purpose, and so on. From this perspective, even a student working alone is in symbolic (or indirect) interactions with institutional representatives; hence he/she cannot be studied independently of the institutions in which he or she works (see Grossen et al., 2000). The influence of mediation in the piano practice of individual students was particularly evident in Study I.

Language as a collaborative creation (Sawyer, 2001) appears to have a central role in identity work and mediation. This study as a whole highlighted how communal 'oughts' and 'shoulds', nurtured in a culturally, socially and historically outlined site, emerged as powerful mediators for identity construction. It appeared that the language of 'oughts' and 'shoulds' was particularly challenging for individuals. It also appeared that within this language lay sources of trouble in identity negotiation, with an associated need to 'talk against' for the sake of one's own identity work. This was particularly the case in Study I. It was also noticeable that finding one's own voice as a musician involved the telling of first-person self-told stories concerning one's identity. Thus, from the perspective of identity work, it matters *who* tells the story and where its origins lie (see Sfard & Prusak, 2005).

As observed in this study, the 'mechanics' of mediation are fairly multifaceted and complex, and within such mediation discursive resources, personal resources and social resources are encountered. Mediation seems to constitute a nexus between personal, local (within a community) and global (within a culture) resources. Here, personal resources refer to more individual resources such as individual talk about 'finding one's own way', whereas local resources refer to communal 'oughts', 'shoulds' and 'paradigmatic trajectories' (see Figure 1). The concept of a *resource* is used here to describe sources for identity work. These can work either as positive forces or as sources of trouble.



**Figure 2.** Socio-cultural resources in identity negotiations

Mediation seems to be a phenomenon that lies at the heart of development and identity negotiations among young musicians. It includes promises of learning and the construction of artistic identity, bearing in mind that these do not happen in a vacuum or inside individual heads. The results of this study indicated how identity work is always inflected with and coloured by social meanings. As Wilson and MacDonald (2005, p. 343) express the matter, ‘musical identities are inextricably linked to a social and cultural milieu that is constantly evolving’. In line with Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of cultural mediation and the shared knowledge of a culture, this study demonstrates how relationships with meaningful others, such as teachers, are crucial sites in which people come to learn cultural habits and ways of talking.

### 5.5.2 Trouble

As noted already earlier in this study the relations between the individual and the social can be incompatible or problematic. Troubles and challenges were observed in this study especially within the transitional movement to the music institution and to the community of musicians. The students’ intense identity work, at these points in particular, is relational and appears to be a site of trouble and challenge.

The findings of the present study suggested that identity negotiation, as a relative and mediated event, both compels and enables individuals to combine historical, social and cultural aspects of identity. Challenges, tensions

and troubles in combining these aspects seemed to be at the heart of identity negotiation. The multifaceted nature of identity work was illustrated in particular by moments of repair, hesitation, conflict, unease, confusion, retreat and difficulty (see Wetherell, 2005).

*Between traditions and one's own voice*

Students were frequently confronted with dilemmas as they attempted to weave together or reconcile established and personal meanings. This highlighted the inherent tension between autonomy and collectivity, and the recurrent dialectic between the students' own biographical accounts and shared norms and expectations. Identity work thus appears to involve contestation and struggle at what Hall (1993, p. 135) refers to as 'the unstable point at which the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history and of a culture'.

In parallel with the students' struggle to enter the music institution and become a member of the community of musicians, they seemed to experience troubles and challenges in identity work in constructing own individual interpretations of music pieces in the student-teacher relationship. The findings thus pointed to areas of conflict and tension in the creative relationship between student and teacher. Inherent in such conflicts was the risk of troubled, spoiled or unwanted identities.

The essence of interpretative work is to be found in the production of creative interpretations that resonate with, renew and develop established cultural traditions and practices. Such work is a vital part of what it is to be a successful soloist. It is in the attempts to reconcile the personal and the established that conflict and tension often arises. It seemed that the process of constructing and re-constructing interpretations was strongly framed and constrained by the socio-cultural context. Constraints were imposed by the wider musical culture, and students faced the risk of a 'troubled' identity entailing a lack of their own story.

The extracts presented in the study testify to both the difficulty and the necessity for students of finding their own voice and telling their own story, whilst working in a way which recognises and respects established traditions. It is such expressions of the self and of a life lived and experienced that seem to be associated positively with students' confidence as soloists; these expressions are legitimated, sanctioned or prohibited in the context of the creative relationship between a student and his/her teacher.

### *Social comparison*

Identity work was resourced by comparative accounts of performances in the entrance tests (by the informants themselves and by others) and by early experiences of being in the academy. All in all, social comparisons appeared to be a risk for troubles in identity work.

Especially when engaging in creative work, social comparison often plays a crucial role (Langer, Pirson, & Delizonnave, 2010). It is true that some studies have demonstrated positive, motivational effects in social comparisons, in so far as they spur individuals on in their creative processes (e.g. Michinov & Primois, 2005); nevertheless, this study demonstrates the negative sides of social comparison for the creative process. Other studies, too, have indicated that social comparison can lead to suboptimal levels of innovation and creativity. Langer and colleagues (2010) argue that when people make social comparisons, much of the contextual information (such as who chose the criteria for evaluation and the motivation underlying the criteria) is overlooked. Training people to be more mindful with respect to evaluation can reduce the negative consequences of comparisons and help people to engage more actively in their learning and in their approach to creative endeavours. Mindful social comparisons can also help people to gain more information about themselves (Langer et al., 2010), for example, regarding their individual expressive styles and personal strengths as musicians.

### **5.5.3 Agency**

The present research, which started from the transition to music studies and ended with the transition from studies to working life, traced a process of becoming agentic. The results highlighted how, especially during the students' transition to the music community, they seemed unable to define community-level resources such as norms and expectations. Moreover, they 'talked against' some of these resources. Thus, the students were inclined to start their identity negotiation from acceptance or non-acceptance of the traditional communal and cultural 'shoulds', as well as the expected trajectories of music students and musicians (see Juuti & Littleton, 2010). Overall, from the perspective of becoming agentic, this period was characterised by resistance and 'talking against' communal expectations, and such talk entailed and reflected intense struggle in the processes of identity negotiation. The analyses showed the extent to which students oriented themselves to—and frequently 'talked against'—established ideas, norms and 'shoulds', and further, to notions of exceptionality in relation to musical practice. This kind of 'talking against' established ideas is what Billig calls 'rhetorical' work (Billig, 1987).

Billig suggests that such talk ‘is not just an interaction with the other person(s) present but takes place on several levels simultaneously, as a speaker also responds to imagined or previously experienced audiences and criticisms’ (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 24). ‘Talking against’ thus emerged as strongly agentic identity work.

Students were not passive in their identity work: they actively negotiated their individual ways and accounts. Agency seemed to lie in the individual’s capacity to recognise and resist, subvert or change expected trajectories and communal expectations, and in a sense, master these. As argued previously in this study, identity work and agency are embedded in interaction and communication. From this perspective, therefore, I would accept the idea of agency and identity-making as a communicational practice. At the same time, I would reject the notion of identities as being exclusively discursive entities that one merely ‘represents’ or ‘describes’ while talking (see Sfard & Prusak, 2005). I would emphasise in particular that identity plays an important role whenever one addresses the question of how collective discourses shape personal worlds, and how individual voices combine in the voice of the community.

All in all, in the context of the transition from study to working life, the emergence of one’s own ‘stories’, one’s own ‘ways’ and the use of inner resources was evident. Furthermore, the emergence of agency was strongly evidenced in the form of defining one’s path, and going beyond merely talking against communal demands. Crucially, the transition from study to working life is bound up with processes of agency. Agency was evidenced strongly in the students’ construction and re-construction of their own creative practices—in so far as these were not fixed or dependent on communal expectations, but reflected freedom, widening perspectives, independence, the embracing of multiple influences and the anchoring of individual lives in more holistic ways. All this underscored the significance of following one’s individual needs and creative paths and trajectories, instead of adhering to fixed paths, communal expectations and ‘shoulds’. One of the key elements in the process of becoming agentic seemed to be an acceptance of multiplicity.

The transition to working life was characterised by ‘moving beyond’ and ‘getting rid of’ communal ‘oughts’ and ‘shoulds’, during a period of orienting oneself to new influences, and of finding one’s own voice and inner resources. This was a period in which agency emerged strongly. Thus, one can say that agency in terms of a person’s identity as a professional musician involves (re)negotiating personal pathways, narrations and trajectories. Such trajectories do not appear to be ‘canonical’, i.e. fixed or dependent on com-



munal expectations; they reflect creative freedom and independence, and encompass multiple influences.

This movement from constraint to freedom appeared to be a very challenging process. However, it was one that afforded novice musicians a means to re-construct their narrations and trajectories as musicians in such a way as to suit their work contexts and their lives more generally. Furthermore, within this process a growth in confidence was evident. Overall, it appeared that professional identities were (re-)constructed in a negotiation process, involving the interaction between personal agency and social constraints. The observations made in the study underlined how agency entails being able to make choices concerning one's own work, based on one's own interests and motivations. Having agency means that in relation to cultural practices (constraints and opportunities) one is able to act in a way that corresponds to personal values and hopes (Eteläpelto & Saarinen, 2006).

As analysis shows, identities are not negotiated in a vacuum. In the process of becoming agentic the relations between the individual and social norms appear to be central. Thus, social relations—involving for example independence from authority figures whilst being supported by meaningful others—seem to be especially critical in this process. In the period of transition out of the academy this process was enabled through some degree of 'getting rid of' or 'moving above' the academy community. This did not actually entail a total distancing from previous communities and social practices. Nevertheless, in the period of becoming agentic, it appeared to be important for students to find new communities, and to have support from others.

These observations underline the extent to which becoming agentic is a deeply socio-cultural and socially distributed process. It involves complex interaction and social networks. Furthermore, it is a process that seems not to happen quickly. In addition, the observations demonstrate how the process of negotiating one's professional identity is bound up with in an agentic construction and re-construction of creative and holistic career trajectories. The participants in this study had to master, resist and change expected trajectories and practices, and further, create new ones.

Agency is bound up with the creative aspect of human activity. Social structures do not completely determine our activities. We have a sphere of free will, permitting us to negotiate our way through social structures in a way that allows us to use our 'inner resources', that is, to pursue our goals and intentions. Agency entails the capacity to actively engage with structures—to be a self-directed reflective actor in a community or society, having the purpose to do new things, build new meanings, engage in collective ac-

tivities and change the structures in question. People can thus make and remake social structures in the course of their everyday activities.

#### **5.5.4 Creativity in identity negotiation**

The present study shed light on the processes through which musicians' identities and career trajectories come to be construed creatively. Creativity in this context is needed in the (re-)negotiation of career trajectories—especially with respect to the transition from traditional practice to contemporary working life. Creativity was a necessary tool for the career-young musicians enabling them to (re-)negotiate their work identities creatively so that they would function adequately as workers in the contemporary musical world.

The results of this study are in line with the ideas of Vera John-Steiner (John-Steiner, 2000), who suggested that the ultimate act of creativity is the making of the self. Also relevant here are the well-known concepts of Angela McRobbie (1998), who connected creative working with 'self-actualisation'. McRobbie noted the congruence between conventional characterisations of the artistic or creative and recent theorisations of contemporary identity or subjectivity. Creativity is thus not merely visible in musicians' creative interpretations of pieces, but fundamental to the process of becoming agentic and negotiating one's identity as a musician. Creativity is often linked to something 'new'. In this study 'new' meant new career paths and life opportunities, solutions and problems. Creativity seems to be a necessary tool for survival for the contemporary worker in the field of music. It enables the musician to be flexible and entrepreneurial (inside and outside institutions and organisations). Furthermore, it enables musicians to construct and reconstruct identities, negotiate uncertain career paths and generally manage uncertain situations. Professional musicians are, in their working life, expected to be flexible and entrepreneurial, and to be willing to re-shape and re-brand their work identities. Creativity is needed in constituting career trajectories, especially with respect to transitions, such as moving to a music institution, moving into working life and coping with precarious employment relations.

This study calls into question the archetypal image of the individual solo-pianist. It is argued that it is the larger social contexts of musicians' worlds that define and enable the work of musicians' identities. As socio-cultural researchers suggest, creativity takes place in a community linked by common identities and a feeling of belonging, and by all the shared practices that enable communication. Through these practices the creative process is not merely enabled, but also categorised and valued. Furthermore, communities have their own culture and enveloping emotional atmosphere. These are the

facets that create the framework for creativity through subjects' sense-making and identity work.

### **5.5.5 Transitions**

In this study, two different kinds of transitions were found, both of which were observed to have a bearing on identity: one transition was bound up with trouble and challenges, while the other made possible the discovery of multiple creative ways for the individuals concerned. Both of these were connected with the emergence of agency. It is worth emphasising here that the 'talking against' transition (and not merely the 'creative' transition) was instrumental in enabling young professionals to actively reconstrue their musical and work identities, and their learning processes. Within both transitions, notions of one's own musicianship and work identity were bound up with a process of intense re-construction and re-configuration.

In this study, transitions were found to be of particular significance for the negotiation of identity. Such transitions constitute moments of unusually intense change in identity. As Wenger (1998) points out, transitions demand significant transformations, and such transformations may involve intensive identity work. A transition is a moment in which the person has to reorder narratives of the self, a phase when individuals become exposed to new identity positions and new practices (see Wetherell, 2006). Thus, transitions are points at which a person is encouraged to rehearse new narratives and to use the associated understandings of identity to guide, define and organise new practices.

As argued above, transitions seem to be propitious for reassessing one's identity and trajectories. It seems that the transition to working life produces qualitatively different kinds of identity work from those engaged in during the period of transition to studies (see Juuti & Littleton, 2010; Wirtanen & Littleton, 2004). Finding new ways of negotiating one's identity as a professional musician makes possible greater coherence with the demands of contemporary working life, and this can lead to more opportunities to develop oneself as a working musician. From this point of view, the transition to working life appeared to be of paramount importance for the participants in this study.



## 6 Discussion

Chapter 5 summarised the main empirical findings of the study as a whole (Studies I–III). In this chapter I shall return to the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 2 and outline becoming a musician as a relational, mediated and multifaceted socio-cultural process. I shall discuss the socio-cultural perspective on musical identity in daily practices, and the dialectics between identity and development. I shall reflect on the research process and consider the validity and ethical questions that arose from the study. Finally, I shall evaluate the empirical and theoretical significance of the study and set an agenda for further research.

### 6.1 A return to the socio-cultural starting point

This study showed that an individual musician, or indeed a community of musicians, cannot be theorised in an independent manner but must be understood in terms of the historically changing, mediated relations in which musicians are integral and constitutive parts (see Roth, 2004). As previous chapters have emphasised, becoming a musician is a complex and multi-faceted, relational, mediated socio-cultural process.

The socio-cultural theory used in this study proved to be an appropriate starting point for an examination of becoming a musician and the construction and re-construction of identities.

I would argue that musical identity work should not be seen through a separation between personal and social identity, nor should one attempt to make a distinction between these two. In fact, they are inseparable from one another. Even if it is methodically challenging to focus on both of these in the same study, it is nevertheless necessary to understand the dialectics between these two aspects.

I would emphasise at this point that the socio-cultural perspective adopted in this study does not say everything there is to say about the processes of identity and learning in music. No single approach represents the whole truth. However, the socio-cultural approach adopted in this study does have, in my view, heuristic value as a means of understanding and seeing. In the case of this particular study, the socio-cultural approach seemed appropriate, since it has the capacity to address the individual, psychological, social, cultural, linguistic, and even historical developments that have made human experience possible (see Wenger, 2009).

### *Identity in daily practices*

One of the strengths of this study lay in its attempt to look at the dialectics between the individual and the social in musical identity work in daily action. I would argue that the focus I chose—whereby I examined the daily practices, policies and workings of parts of the educational system (see Wenger, 2009)—makes it possible to understand the dialectics between the individual and social, my contention being that these form a key ‘context’ to musical identity work and negotiation. Furthermore, I would argue that this study has illustrated the usefulness of a practice-based strategy (Wetherell, 2005), starting from people’s accounts of activities in particular sites. This bottom-up approach can shed light on how identities emerge within practices. In contrast to this approach, what has been referred to as an intersectional approach to plural identities would have involved more of a top-down strategy, focusing on social categories (such as nationality and gender). The intersectional approach to plural identities embarks on its consideration of multiplicity through a focus on identity blocks or social categories, and how these identity categories relate to one another (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Its focus is on social divisions, social structures and the histories of the formation of these identity categories. In this sense it could be regarded as a somewhat static model. The focus on categories appears to neglect such aspects as the context-creating activities of social actors in everyday positioning (Wetherell, 2005). Extensive attempts to use this kind of intersectional thinking can be found in social identity theory as applied within the field of social psychology; in that field, social identities are category- and group-based, and personal identity is, loosely speaking, everything else.

From the current study, it appears that musical identity work is *everywhere* in everyday musical practices. Language and talk can themselves be seen as a practice (Edley, 2001), and through their talk, people are constantly positioned in highly dynamic, active and mobile ways.

The study of multiplicity and the articulation of plural identities begins with different forms of order in practice; in this phase one will be drawn to look at the complex positions people take up at the different ‘levels’ of social action—positions that in this study appear as different kinds of resources (personal, local and global) impinging on talk and identity work (see Wetherell, 2005, p.7).

### *Identity and development*

It is not unreasonable to assume that musical identities are crucial to learning and development in music. The socio-cultural conception of individual development has highlighted the idea of development as a dialogic, interactive

and culturally sensitive process. One can observe similar aspects in respect of development and identity work. Development is shaped by relationships with other people, and by the culture in which those relationships are located. The same holds for identity.

As was argued in connection with the role of talk in musical identity work, the socio-cultural concept of development highlights the vital role of language in the developmental process. Socio-cultural theorists such as Bruner (1990) and Wertsch (1991) ascribe important functions to language as a cultural tool, one by which knowledge is shared, stored and made available as a pedagogical and cognitive tool.

Musical identity work does not merely promote individual learning and development. Fragments of identity are also the currency of the practice of communities (see Wetherell, 2005). Musical identity work is thus at the same time a vital part of communities and their learning. Wenger (2009) argues that the notion of learning for communities means that learning is an issue of refining communities' practices and ensuring new generations of members.

## **6.2 Methodological considerations**

The methodological choices were examined in some detail in Chapter 4, where issues of validity and ethics were also touched on. However, at this point it seems appropriate to reflect further on the overall research process. Here I shall utilise Kvale's (1995) criteria, defining the three kinds of validity that are applicable to a qualitative research process. These rely on what could be termed a postmodern conception of knowledge as social construction, and they can be listed as follows: validity as a quality of craftsmanship, communicative validity, and pragmatic validity.

First of all, by craftsmanship, Kvale (1995) means the whole process of knowledge production, including such elements as organising the research setting, data collection and analysis, the creation of a theoretical frame, and generalisation of the results. This type of validity relates also to the classical problem of whether the study actually investigates what it promises to investigate. Secondly, communicative validity refers to the fact that both an academic and a general audience should be able to follow and analyse the processes and choices throughout. Thirdly, by pragmatic validity Kvale means the significance and applicability of the study for both academic and wider purposes.

*The validity and credibility of the overall research process*

My dissertation consists of separate, independently published, empirical studies. For this reason it is of particular importance to assess whether the study forms a coherent whole linking the theoretical framework, the methodology and the interpretation of the results. In my study, the separate studies were seen as complementing each another. They were inspired by each other, and the findings and choices made in one study contributed to the selection of the perspective in another. In addition, the results promoted the use of appropriate concepts in the subsequent phases of the research process.

Central in assessing the plausibility and validity of the study is, of course, the extent to which the data analyses were carried out in a systematic, explicit and theoretically well-grounded way. This meant a continual process of re-examining the data and choosing among competing interpretations. For this purpose it was necessary to examine and provide arguments for the credibility of the various knowledge claims.

The openness and credibility of the reporting is an important indicator of validity. It is especially important to explicate the choices made during the reporting process, so that they can be critically examined by the scientific community. Chapter 2 reports the grounds for the empirical, theoretical and methodological choices that guided me. It is also important to let the reader evaluate the interpretations through access to the original data. In relation to this, I was fortunate enough to be able to publish three of my studies (I, II and III) in journals that accept relatively long papers. In this way I was able to include within the reports substantial empirical evidence, and direct examples from the data.

To attain the best possible level of credibility, I attempted to be systematic in both the data collection and the data analysis. In order to ensure good reflexive practice, I attempted to describe and assess in as much depth as possible the choices made during the process.

The plausibility of one's results has traditionally concerned the truthfulness of the interpretations. Evaluations of this aspect were also carried out after the articles had been written. The plausibility of the respondent validation may conceivably be reduced by the fact that the further the research process proceeded, the fewer were the number of participants who were able to provide me with feedback (since many could not be reached). However, four of the participants gave comments which supported the interpretations I have set out in this thesis.

Here it should be borne in mind that in conducting research in which interviews are used as part of the material collection, the researcher is likely to develop close bonds with the research participants. Chapter 4.3 described in



in detail my role as a facilitator in the interview situations. Furthermore my role as an educational psychology expert was evaluated and highlighted.

Beyond the considerations above, the process of analysing required an in-depth theoretical reading, plus critical and continuous dialogue with and feedback from my colleagues and the research community. This included critical evaluations from my supervisor, my research group, conference audiences, and the reviewers of the manuscripts. This use of researcher triangulation may be considered a significant factor regarding the credibility of findings.

One of the challenges in this work was to do justice to the interview materials, bearing in mind that the original language (Finnish) was different from the language of the report. This aspect has also been discussed in Chapter 4.4. An important consideration here was that by taking the risk of using translations of interviews (translations that were checked by bi-lingual experts) my work entered the arena of international scientific discussion, with a consequent increase in validity (given that the work could be picked through and checked in this wider arena).

#### *Pragmatic validity—relevance and applicability of the findings*

Here I shall deal with what Kvale (1995) refers to as pragmatic validity, relating to the relevance and applicability of the study. Traditionally, pragmatic validity has related to the *generalisability* of the research findings. A criticism often directed at this type of qualitative research is that it lacks generalisability. Generalisability is discussed here in terms of transferability, and in relation to the theoretical argumentation.

This study was conducted in the specific context of becoming a musician through the only music academy in Finland. This being so, one would have to be cautious about generalising the results of this study to other contexts. Nevertheless, Wardekker (2000) argues that even if the results of a study are not transferable in the classical way, they ought to have some ‘generative power’. (This power depends, for example, on the question of whether in other situations the same or at least recognisable constraints apply, and on the ways in which the results are made known to others.) Here one is in the realm of judgement and opinion, but I would take the view that my way of theorising in this study context does contain ‘generative power’. Thus, although the empirical case of musicians’ identity negotiation in specific contexts may be singular and particular, the phenomenon of identity negotiation in a sociocultural context, plus the theoretical concepts used for understanding it, could be claimed to have wider applicability.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that this is the first time a study project on Finnish adult musicians' identity work has entered into the discussions of experts in international scholarly arenas. I refer here to the forums formed by international publications and researcher meetings on music psychology (concerning becoming a musician).

One reservation regarding the transferability of this study is that identity negotiation may be so context-dependent and situated that the particular circumstances of, for example, study or work contexts (in Finland and in other countries/other genres in music) are inseparable from the observations and the conclusions drawn. These aspects of 'particularity' are, arguably, matters of degree and judgement; ultimately, the questions of plausibility and transferability must be left to the readers of this study, who can evaluate the significance and implications of the results provided.

My study investigated the basic conditions and challenges pertaining to adult musicians' identity work. It made visible the contradictions that musicians struggle with on a daily basis and emphasised the complex nature of educational work. The transitions to study and from study to working life made possible new identity positions, and appeared to promote the emergence of agency. The importance of my findings is in the careful examination and clarification of the *processes* through which these emerged and became possible. Furthermore, based on the findings and the use of a longitudinal approach, it has been possible to explore participants' professional identity formation and how it develops over time.

The conditions of the follow-up interviews need to be recalled here. Six of the original ten participants were not able to take part in the follow-up interviews because of being temporarily abroad, having a busy work schedule, or not being traceable. There is no information on, for example, these interviewees' success or failure in an international career. It is difficult to judge whether or not their participation would have generated other perspectives into the process of becoming a musician.

Finally, I would suggest that my study has "heuristic validity" (Kvale, 1995) in that it contributes to the academic field by developing applicable theoretical concepts and an appropriate methodology for studying musicians' identity work. I also suggest that my study may be useful for both music students and teachers in offering ways of recognising important aspects of music education today, especially with regard to identity negotiation and the development of agency as an artist. Here it should be noted that pragmatic validity relates not only to the already completed research report but also to the concrete work of the researcher in distributing knowledge through the findings. This relates to my future activity as a researcher: I need to consider

how to translate the findings so that they will be read and utilised by various educational audiences, teachers, administrators, and policy-makers. Such promotion will be an important subsequent step for the study. Further implications of this study are discussed in Chapter 6.4.

### *Ethical issues*

An important theme in reflecting on the research process is the issue of ethics in research and the reporting of research. One of the most basic issues is that participants should be told that they are being researched, know as far as possible the researcher's intentions, participate voluntarily, and have the right to withdraw at any time (Silverman 2001). It has already been noted in Chapter 4.2 that all the participants expressed their willingness to be interviewed. Another important issue is the participants' right to anonymity. In my research reports and articles I have constructed the text so that the person that I am writing about cannot be identified. I have used pseudonyms throughout. I have also let participants read my manuscripts so that they can check if I have mistakenly left in any identifying details. I have cut or changed any details (cities, names of teachers, instruments, etc.) that might make it possible to recognise the participants. These changes have not, however, been such as would affect the analysis of the interview materials. I also decided to leave out of my analyses the data relating to the participants' special work situations and projects. The institution, the Sibelius Academy, was named, since all the participants were studying there. However, the names and details of academy teachers have not been included.

As discussed in Chapter 4.3, I attempted to build trust between the participants and myself. I wanted them to feel comfortable and free in the interview situations. I was genuinely interested in their accounts and experiences, and I encouraged them to talk as much as they wanted. As a researcher, I at times felt that the accounts might be straying too far from the themes and topics under study. However, these parts of the interviews proved to be highly informative in the subsequent analysis.

Building trust is not an easy task. To some extent, my location outside the music academy helped participants to feel that they could talk freely about their relationship with music, their studies and their work. Many participants were happy to have the opportunity to talk about their experiences, process their own learning, and 'think' about important things in their lives.

### 6.3 Further challenges for research work

#### *Breaking with traditions*

I take the view that there is a need to better understand the identity work and learning of adult musicians. Music research has until recently focused on young people—a perspective that continues to reflect the traditional notion of young virtuosi. In recent years research on adult learning has increased in other fields, with more widespread interest in adult learners. This has made possible a better understanding of adult learners. Such an understanding is also needed in the field of music education.

Overall, music identity research has been patchy and fragmented in nature. It does not have its own large-scale paradigms or theories. Moreover, the theories that it does apply are adopted from educational psychology, psychology and sociology. One of the challenges, then, is to increase the dialectic between traditional identity theories in music psychology and new initiatives concerning identity in other fields of the behavioural sciences.

As mentioned previously, stage-based accounts of musician's development have yielded important insights into the process of becoming a musician. However, I argue (see earlier chapters of this study) that the process of becoming a musician is not simply about sequentially passing through particular developmental stages. Rather, the process of becoming a musician entails the negotiation of significant, complex transitional periods involving changing contexts—for example, that of moving into working life after completing a programme of formal study. Transitional periods appear to be crucial with respect to musicians' identity negotiations. The process of identity construction within a transition is intense and complex, as there are a variety of potential choices and musicianship pathways to be negotiated. In accounting for and narrating their musicianship in transition, individuals construct and re-construct within their talk notions of professional trajectories; these incorporate, and also resist, multiple and diverse elements arising from culturally established trajectories, the current context, and future visions (Wenger, 1998, 153–156). Thus, it can be said that identity is not only about a 'positive' on-going stage-like development. It includes trouble and struggles arising from daily practices in the process of becoming a musician. Thus, the most interesting elements lie in the dynamics of identity negotiations in multiple daily practices. This process, and its associated challenges, are of the utmost fascination, as they do not simply look at the 'successful' results of a few individuals. From this it follows that the focus is not on fixed, and relatively clearly-defined categories such as race or nation; instead, with the

focus on identity, one is dealing with a phenomenon arising from current socio-cultural contexts, daily 'life', and communal practices.

We need a better understanding of what these practices might consist of. What seems to be called for is a renewal in the traditions of music research. Furthermore, there is a need for research that would connect the discussion of identities in music with more general discussion concerning identity and learning. Without this, there is a danger of music-psychology research remaining too isolated, and hence unable to take advantage of scientific developments within broader areas of research.

## **6.4 Implications for the learning environment, mentoring and multiplicity**

### *The learning environment*

The study showed that in their identity work musicians were often confronted with the dilemma of weaving together the individual and the social. This was evidenced especially in their attempts to reconcile communal expectations and personal aims. I would argue that one of the core challenges for music institutions is the construction of a learning environment that would enable the balanced construction of individual and social aspects. In order to negotiate and re-define one's personal and professional identity, there have to be mutually constitutive spaces for developing professionals, spaces that offer resources for realising personal goals and plans (Eteläpelto & Saarinen, 2006). The transition from study to working life seemed to offer clear opportunities for this. Moreover, if we accept that subjects have agency within studying and working communities, it follows that subjects' personal interests and choices are of central importance; thus they should be implicated in the subjects' learning within communities of professional education, and within working life experiences.

If identity-making is seen as a communicational practice, communication becomes the first thing to focus on in terms of practice. I would suggest that in this respect the teacher-student relationship is one of the forums in which to start. Effective teaching can be described as *improvisational* (Sawyer, 2004), in situations where communication within the lesson is constructed as a form of collective improvisation of meaning and social organisation from moment to moment. In such a manner of communication, collaboration and talk is not pre-structured; instead it is open-ended, functioning in ways that encourage the student/students to contribute equally to the flow of the interaction (Sawyer, 2004). If the lesson is scripted and directed only by the teacher, students cannot co-construct their own knowledge. Sawyer (2004)

emphasises the need for collaboration to emerge, adding that creative teaching is a process of disciplined improvisation. The process of improvisation will no doubt be constrained by broader structures such as the curriculum. This implies that the most effective interaction in the teaching-learning situation will balance structure and script with flexibility and improvisation.

In addition to what happens in the lesson situations, another crucial element is what happens in the community in general. One of the main tasks of a music institution as a collective is first and foremost to support students' learning processes and identity work, not merely the construction and re-construction of the institution itself. Music education institutions, such as the academy, thus need to give careful consideration as to how a sense of mutual respect and trust is to be fostered within their musical communities, such as to allow creative, interpretative musical risk-taking to flourish without compromising either technical excellence or the students' sense of themselves as proficient pianists. Even if musical communities undoubtedly aspire towards this kind of learning environment, it emerges as a difficult and complex accomplishment. A relevant point here is that institutions, in addition to their intrinsic value and their societal and international purposes, exist for individual students. I would contend that students themselves should be seen as a resource that is important in the construction and re-construction of institutions. In fact, I would take the view that institutions and communities should be *actively built by all members*. Such shared community construction and re-construction work will in itself partly form the basis for the learning environment of its members.

One of the key questions arising in this regard is: who is to lead these communities? I would argue that participants in these communities are themselves the most important factors in the construction and 'leading' of communities. All participants should be a part of this 'leading' process and there should be forums and practices for this to happen. The development and learning of communities is located in the relationships between participants, and these relationships are fostered by interaction and community skills. Individuals need to reach adequate levels of active participation and agency in order development and learning to happen.

### *Identity mentoring*

Lesson situations can be seen as sites in which agency in identity is learned and coached. This implies that resources will be offered for realising personal goals and plans. Relevant elements might include, for example, discussion of individual aims, communal expectations, the origins of different kinds of expectations, teaching-learning strategies—all this in addition to analysing

personal learning processes, discussion of future plans, discussion of challenges in the learning, and so on. For example, during the period of transition to the academy it would be worth sharing discussion of the early experiences typical of newcomers (since this seemed to be an area of struggle for students). Success in the career of a musician is not merely dependent on technical or interpretative skills. It is also influenced by social relationships, and by cultural level factors such as communicative conventions and the traditions of learning and teaching. The identity of musicians is thus profoundly connected to future career paths and success as a musician.

I would argue that 'identity-mentoring' might be especially useful in respect of musicians' learning and development (and indeed, this may apply to development within artistic fields in general). Music students' learning and development is closely connected with the musicians as people, as individuals who have their own selfhood. This area is clearly one of the most individual and sensitive aspects in the process of becoming a musician. Becoming and being a musician are part of a lifelong process. However, early adulthood and adulthood, i.e. the period of studies in institutions, forms one of the most important and acute contexts for identity construction. At the moment, there is no systematic facilitating, identity-mentoring or coaching for these processes in the field of learning music. In contrast, for example in the field of sports (both individual and group sports) this kind of coaching already has a long history. I would argue that both music institutions and individual musicians might benefit from systematic 'identity mentoring' in conjunction with the traditional teaching of how to play an instrument. This could enable individuals to find a new perspective on teaching-learning, and help them to understand better the construction of individuals and institutions.

### *Multiplicity*

Identity work is a multi-faceted process, embedded in diverse contexts, and meeting diverse needs. Within this study, agentic identity work was strongly evidenced in the students' construction and re-construction of their own creative practices, based on multiple influences. This is where we might begin to acknowledge that we are not born with complex identities; rather we become 'multiplied' through ongoing sociality (Hodges, 2002). We also need to acquire the ability to shift (Pitman, 2002) between identities.

Identity as a solo-pianist is only one amongst several musical identity projects that may need to be negotiated and managed. All of these can be enriching, fulfilling and deeply meaningful in a personal sense. The period of transition into working life is particularly challenging the idea of a professional solo-performer. It seems that a working musician is someone who practises

within the profession of music in (possibly) a number of specialist fields. However, this diversity of roles is not reflected in the curriculum at the time of entry to the academy. Thus, professional musicians face, after their studies, an unknown and precarious future. Within this new phase of their lives, their career scripts need to be re-written to adapt to the context of real working life. Bennett (2007) has come to fairly similar conclusions, arguing that music institutions face significant challenges in achieving students' preparedness for a diverse career, and for wide-ranging artistic practices. Acceptance of and preparation for a more holistic career would enable more music students to find their own way and to realise their musical aspirations in their music studies.

In order to help musicians manage transitions smoothly, it appears that we need to understand more about the multiple tensions and conflicts that they encounter and struggle with. Thus we need to support what I have called their 'identity-work' – to enable them to tell their own stories and to construct creative and multiple trajectories. It can be argued that we should question the appropriateness of single, unalterable values in a changing world. It may be that we need to accept alternative, and multiple, values. Contradictions need to be addressed and a variety of approaches adopted if people are to function within the complexity of the world.

One of the challenges in the field of music is to develop a learning environment that will make possible and accept alternative approaches and trajectories for students. This will necessitate discussion on how to include marginalised voices, how to recognise the different contributions that participants can offer to the community, and further, to consider how different perspectives and voices can inform different beliefs and values. This will require discussion and possibly redefinition of what is good, important or valuable in a changing world. It will also involve, among much else, new ways of understanding how to study music, and new ways of achieving the success of individuals and institutions in the field of music.

All in all, I would argue that one of the main challenges for educational institutions will be to create learning environments that can prepare students for their future in the uncertain, and as yet unknown, domain of working life. Working on more creative ways of negotiating an identity as a professional musician would seem a good way for music students to achieve coherence with the demands that will be made on them in the future.



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