

The relationship between choir leaders' current practices and experiences of choral singing during their youth

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Abstract

This article maps out and considers the relationship between choir leaders' experiences in choir singing in their youth and their current practices in choir leading, with a focus on the context of Swedish choir leadership. The theoretical framework is a socio-cultural perspective, with a focus on cultural practices and mediating tools. The study is based on a quantitative survey, completed by 352 choir leaders, in which eleven cultural environments and eight mediating tools are in focus. The choir leaders responded to questions about their childhood and youth experiences of choir singing and their current practices. Results indicate a significant connection between the working approaches they experienced while growing up and their use of those approaches in their present choir leaders' cultural practices. Furthermore, on a group level, results show that two major cultural environments appear particularly dominant: schools and churches, and of the mediating tools, piano and a cappella appear to be dominant. The results also indicate a significant relationship between the mediating tools learned in the participants' youth, and their use in their choir leading practices today. By contrast, the use of prerecorded voice parts for rehearsals seems to have increased considerably. The results reveal a great variety of educational experiences that the choir leaders bring and illustrate the development of choir leading as a rich, complex interaction between practices that the choir leaders themselves had experienced. The overall results show that the educational environments of choir leading, as reported by the participants, are not a straightforward route by way of a specific educational programme. Instead, it may be described as educational environments explored by the participants themselves — pathways through formal and informal cultural environments.

Keywords: choir leadership, cultural practice, mediating tools, music education

1. Introduction

Sweden has a rich choir tradition (Bygdéus, 2015) and ensuring sustainable choir leader¹ competence for the future requires a long-term perspective on how choir leaders develop their skills. Our overarching intention with this article is to contribute to a better understanding of how choir leaders acquire competence. Previous research (Jansson and Balsnes, 2020b; Jansson et al., 2019a, 2019b) suggests that lifelong practice is more influential than formal choir leader education when it comes to choir leaders' present practices and identity as choir leaders. Contemporary research increasingly recognises the multifaceted nature of choirs and choral conducting (Sandberg Jurström, 2009; Jansson, 2013). However, the impact of past experiences of choir singing and leadership during childhood and youth on a person's current leadership and working approaches has not been investigated in detail. In this study, the relationship between a person's past choir experiences and certain aspects of their current choir leader practice is examined. An array of specific working approaches, cultural practices, and mediating tools is the focus of choir leading practices. Drawing on quantitative data, this article examines the relationship between the youth experiences of 352 choir leaders in Sweden and selected aspects of their current practice, including qualifications and backgrounds.

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to map out and examine the relations between choir leaders' experiences of choral singing in childhood and youth and their current approaches to choral conducting, with a particular focus on how education and early involvement in choral singing have influenced their current leadership. The research question is: What is the relationship between these early experiences and present practices?

3. Previous research – choral conducting educational practices

Choral singing holds a prominent position in the Nordic countries, ranking among the most popular social activities in terms of participation (Jansson et al., 2018). It spans a broad spectrum, from professional ensembles to informal collective singing, both within and beyond institutional settings. Given the diverse landscape of choral singing in the Nordic countries, the avenues through which choral leaders develop their skills are equally varied (Jansson, 2018b). The following is an attempt to identify the diverse professional journeys of choral leaders.

Previous research highlights two key aspects of choral conductor education that contribute to the development of conducting techniques and leadership approaches. First, formal learning is structured, institutionally supported, and primarily led by qualified mentors following a hierarchical curriculum (Mak, 2004). Second, informal learning is more flexible and often self-directed. Informal learning can occur within or outside institutions, with an emphasis on the teacher as a facilitator – one who fosters individual, peer or group learning (Green, 2008). Nevertheless, Folkestad (2006) describes formal

¹ In this article, we use the terms choir leader and choral conductor synonymously, as some aspects include, or related to both, in the contexts are studied.

versus informal learning in music as two poles on a continuum, rather than a dichotomy. He emphasises that different aspects of formal and informal learning can be integrated and coexist in the specific learning situation, regardless of the context (Folkestad, 2006).

A quantitative study conducted by Jansson and others (2019b) examined a broad range of choral conductors' competencies by analysing how they rated their own skills and the importance they assigned to different competencies. The authors argue that, while the participants valued their conductor education, they also indicated that practical experience was the most influential factor in shaping their perceptions of their own competence. Moreover, the importance of different competencies may vary depending on the rehearsal requirements of different choirs. Furthermore, Jansson and Balsnes (2020b) conducted a meta-analysis of several studies on choral conductor education and practice in Scandinavia, investigating the interplay between education and practice in building the choral conductor profession. The findings are presented by means of a conceptual model that integrates three key perspectives: learning within communities of practice, the three stages of professional practice, and a three-layered framework of choral conducting competencies. Interestingly, despite the emphasis on the importance of gestural skills in formal conductor education, they were considered less critical in practice. Instead, relational competencies were identified as an essential area for developing conducting students' own conducting identity. These findings align with previous research (Jansson et al., 2018, 2019a, 2019b; Jansson and Balsnes, 2020a).

Educational institutions in Scandinavia offer programmes for choral conductors and church musicians in which conducting classes are part of the curriculum. However, programmes have different origins and histories and, therefore, they have varying profiles (rhythmic choral leadership, classical choral leadership, children and youth choirs and music theatre choirs) (Jansson et al., 2018). A recurring challenge in these programmes is the gap between the ideal curriculum and practical limitations: no time-limited programme can fully encompass all necessary competencies, creating competition for time and focus. As a result, educators often view formal training as just one phase in a lifelong learning process (Jansson et al., 2018). A master-apprenticeship model influences the structure and delivery of these programmes, where students at different levels often learn alongside each other in shared classes. This approach not only fosters experiential learning but also means that progression is not strictly embedded in the curriculum itself. Instead, as Jansson and others (2018) suggest, "progression is something that happens within the candidate" (p. 156), emphasizing the individualised nature of learning and professional development in choral conducting.

The journey to becoming a choir leader involves diverse educational experiences that include formal and informal learning opportunities. Higher education, alongside experiential learning, functions as an interactive system where the learner, subject matter, and the environment continuously shape each other (Gumm, 2004; Varvarigou and Durrant, 2011). Additionally, informal learning, which may occur outside structured education, provides conductors with a diverse set of tools and techniques. It offers choral

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leaders alternative methods to refine their craft and develop their skills (Cooper, 2017). Varvarigou and Durrant (2011), for example, highlight not only the role of traditional cognitive apprenticeship in choral conducting education (e.g., reflection, problem-solving, repetition with feedback, expert modelling and peer interaction) but also emphasise the importance of effective training and socio-cultural communities of practice, including teaching contexts (e.g., culture, traditions, religions and resources). This framework provides a basis for understanding the contexts that shape the development of learner-conductors (Varvarigou and Durrant, 2011). Informal learning, as described by Green (2002), refers to the self-directed and experience-based approach. Green (2002) developed a pedagogical approach based on idiosyncratic, informal learning – one in which students acquire musical skills outside of formal education. In this learning process, students select their own repertoire, often learning by ear as they copy recordings and play in self-organised groups. Rather than following a structured, scaffolded progression of skills, they develop musical abilities in an organic and sometimes unstructured manner. Green (2002, 2008) points out that informal learning environments allow students to engage with music that resonates with their personal identities, fosters motivation and promotes creativity. Additionally, because there is a reduced emphasis on formal music notation, students rely less on instructors and take greater ownership of their learning.

However, rehearsing by ear, under the guidance of a conductor, allows participation from individuals with limited music-reading skills. Moreover, idiosyncratic informal learning might involve singers picking up harmonies by ear rather than reading notation, adapting vocal styles from recordings, or learning through participation rather than by means of formal instruction (Linaberry, 2021). The development of digital tools, such as prerecorded voice parts, has further expanded informal learning opportunities beyond traditional settings, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Daffern et al., 2021; Kerry, 2022). The use of prerecorded parts, widely adopted over the past decades, serves as a valuable tool for individual practice at home between choir rehearsals. In the past, similar approaches – such as tape-recorded parts for memorisation – have been used (Lilliestam, 1997).

The relation between choir leaders' experiences in choral singing and their current approaches to choral conducting can also be understood through the well-known phenomenon known as teaching the way you were taught (Bandura, 1977; Lave, 1988). This concept is widely recognised across various educational fields, including choral conducting (Gumm, 2004; Varvarigou, 2016). Research suggests that individuals often replicate the instructional methods they experienced as learners. Those taught through a traditional, teacher-centred approach are more likely to adopt similar methods, while those exposed to student-centred, collaborative learning may carry those principles into their own teaching (Prosser et al., 2008). This phenomenon is particularly relevant to choral conducting, where experiences in choir shape not only musical preferences but also rehearsal techniques, such as the integration of sight-singing into rehearsals and leadership styles (Demorest, 2001).

Furthermore, Oleson and Hora (2014) emphasise that prior experiences shape teaching practices in complex ways. Faculty members, for instance, do not simply model

their teaching on their own instructors, but draw from a diverse range of experiences, including their roles as learners, students, researchers and practitioners. They point out that faculty approaches to teaching are “strongly influenced by their experiences as learners throughout the life course, where specific teaching (and study) habits are adopted along with more subtle ways of thinking and acting” (Oleson and Hora, 2014, p. 42). The study suggests that professional developers and policymakers should recognise and build upon faculty members’ existing ‘craft’ knowledge, which is acquired through diverse experiences.

In sum, understanding the influences of formal and informal learning, along with different types of prior knowledge, offers a more nuanced perspective on the formation of teaching identity and the development of competencies.

4. Theoretical perspective

A socio-cultural community of practice influences how individuals perceive and engage with their learning and practicing environments. This perspective emphasises the importance of considering the diverse contexts in which choral conductors receive training, including institutional (e.g., universities or conservatories), cultural (e.g., the musical traditions of a particular community) and individual (e.g., the conductor’s personal background, musical experiences, and goals). This article adopts a theoretical framework grounded in a socio-cultural perspective, which highlights learning as a relational process dependent on interactions. It focuses on learning within cultural environments, mediated through mediating tools in cultural practices – specifically, in this article, within the context of Swedish choral leadership. Below, three aspects are presented: learning as relational processes, learning within cultural practices, and learning through mediating tools.

4.1 Learning as relational processes

Interaction with other people is of great importance for an individual’s learning and development, as creativity and other higher cognitive skills progress through such interaction (Vygotsky, 1934/1999). One aspect of the development of higher cognitive skills is that human beings progress through interactive processes. These processes are *relational* – relating to and interacting with the surroundings and through *mediating*, meaning intermediation grounded in social processes. Inspired by Vygotsky (1934/1999, 1995/2010), Wertsch (1985), Säljö (2000, 2005), Mead (see Blumer 1986, 2003) and von Wright (2000), central concepts are presented through an overarching approach to learning and creative activities as *mediated* and *relational* (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels et al., 2007). Mediating tools (e.g., piano), socially situated cultural practices (e.g., choral practices) and collective memory (Bygdéus, 2015, 2018) are considered important in the interaction between an individual and a culture.

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4.2 Learning within cultural practices

Relational learning, as described above, always takes place within and depends on a cultural context (Vygotsky, 1923/2006; Bruner, 1996/2002; Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). Vygotsky (1923/2006) claims that human beings are affected by the culture in which they live, to the extent that it becomes inherited and that learning, therefore, can never be separated from the culture in which it takes place. Rogoff (2003) describes the interaction between culture and the individual as being so important that people are not just affected by culture, but also develop through cultural practice when they participate in and contribute to cultural activities. These cultural activities, in turn, continue and grow because of the participation of future generations. Vygotsky (1923/2006) emphasises that the human mind is filled with the voices of other humans, often referred to as collective memory. Therefore, past, present and future generations interact with culture – an interaction that transcends time and space.

There is a cultural practice within all learning environments. Following Bygdéus (2015, 2018), this study focuses on learning within eleven cultural environments in Sweden, (Swedish translations in brackets): compulsory school (*grundskola*) without further education in music; compulsory school with further education in music; upper-secondary school (*gymnasium*) without further education in music; upper-secondary school with further education in music; community school of music and arts (*kulturskola*); folk high school (*folkhögskola*); the Church of Sweden (*Svenska kyrkan*); nonconformist congregation (*frikyrka*); study association (*studieförbund*); independent organisation; under own authority/other (*egen regi*); and college/university (*högskola/universitet*).

4.3 Learning through mediating tools

As mentioned earlier, the present study regards knowledge as being mediated through cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels et al., 2007). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning always takes place by means of tools that mediate knowledge. He was the first to introduce the idea of mediating tools (see Figure 1).

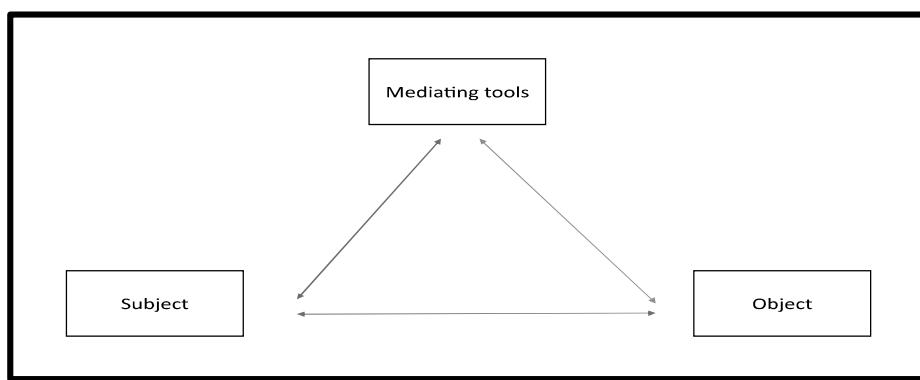


Figure 1: Based on Vygotsky's model of learning through mediating tools from Bruner's (1996/2002) interpretation.

In this study, the relationships in the triangle are interpreted as follows: The learning subject (the choir leader) engages with mediating tools to reach the learning object (choir

leading) (Bygdéus, 2015, 2018). Following Bygdéus (2015, 2018), this study focuses on learning through eight examining mediating tools: piano, a pianist other than the choir leader, prerecorded accompaniments, a cappella rehearsals, accompaniment groups, note-based learning, ear-based learning,² and learning with prerecorded vocal parts. There are parallels between the views of Vygotsky (1923/2006, 1978, 1934/1999, 1995/2010), Bruner (1996/2002) and Säljö (2000, 2005) in acknowledging that tools become mediating tools when integrated into a cultural practice.

A cultural tool is a tool used in a specific cultural context and becomes a mediating tool when used to mediate something in that context. While acknowledging Vygotsky's (1978) differentiation between material and psychological tools, this study does not make this distinction. Instead, we use the more overall inclusive concept of *mediating tools*. Bruner (1996/2002) emphasises the complex character of cultural tools, how they depend on each other and how mediating tools also can represent a psychological dimension. Therefore, he suggests using the concept as a cultural toolbox, in which no distinction is made between psychological and material tools. He further claims that each person possesses a cultural toolbox filled with the cultural tools mastered by that individual.

According to Vygotsky (1978), signs and symbols hold a unique position among the mediating tools used in learning processes. Sign systems can be found in written form and as a set of gestures (Vygotsky 1978; Daniels et al., 2007). These are helpful for thoughts that enable storing more than the brain can contain by placing them outside memory-based brain functions, in what may be described as a metaphorical external hard disc (e.g., by taking notes of things we are supposed to remember). In a musical context, notation is an example of such a sign system (Backman Bister, 2014; Hultberg, 2009). The relation between mental and social processes is a central part of Vygotsky's theories. Wertsch (1985) discusses Vygotsky's theories from two perspectives: both that an individual's higher mental processes have their origin in social processes and that mental processes can only be comprehended when people understand the mediating tools and signs that transmit them. The understanding of mediating tools and signs that transmit mental processes demands some kind of education, interaction, and relation.

5. Method

In this study, the survey method was chosen to map out and examine the relationships between some current practices of choir leaders and their experiences of choral singing in their youth. The use of a quantitative survey, applied at the group level, makes it possible to include a large sample. This method section is divided into four parts: (1) the questionnaire; (2) analysis of questionnaire responses; (3) participants – description of sample; and (4) participants' experiences of cultural environments.

² Ear-based learning, meaning learning without sheet music, with or without instrumental support.

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5.1 The questionnaire

The design of the questionnaire was based on the purpose of this study and was distributed digitally via Google Form to choir organisations and choir leaders in Sweden. One of the researchers (Bygdéus) distributed the survey and maintained contact with the choir organisations, whose representatives informed their members about the survey. The *Questionnaire for you who are a choir leader* (Appendix) remained open throughout the spring semester of 2021, with the first response received on 29 January and the last on 2 June 2021. By participating in the survey, the choir leaders also gave consent to participate in the study. The questionnaire, formulated by the research group, consisted of 38 questions aimed at gathering extensive information about participants' education and background in choir singing and choir leading. The questions focused on determining which cultural environments were relevant (questions 3, 7, 8, 9, 15, and 16), which mediating tools were used (questions 10, 11, 12, 25, 26, and 27) and the age levels of the participants at the time of this study. The eleven cultural environments and eight mediating tools, as outlined in the theoretical perspective, were selected based on prior research in the field (Bygdéus, 2015, 2018) and initial discussions with choir leaders before the development of the questionnaire. A further aim of the questionnaire was to determine choir leaders' views on how well equipped they feel in different choir-leading competencies.

The questionnaire also contained open-ended questions, in which the participants could expand their answers on how they had acquired the competencies they possess and how they perceive current and future choir leader education. The open-ended responses are not analysed or processed in this article, but they are partially used to illustrate and exemplify the quantitative data. The methodology of this study can be described as a mixed-methods approach. According to Leech and Onwuegbuzie's (2009) typology, our study can be characterised as a "partially mixed concurrent dominant status design" (p. 268). It is considered partially mixed because the study is predominantly quantitative rather than qualitative. It is concurrent because both quantitative and qualitative data were distributed and collected to participants through the same survey. The study follows a dominant status design in which the qualitative components play a subordinate role to the quantitative ones, with the latter being central to the analysis. The qualitative data helped to illustrate the quantitative findings and enriched the analysis with more nuanced and comprehensive descriptions, particularly regarding the participants' experiences and educational backgrounds. The quantitative data are presented partially on a descriptive level and partially on an inferential level.

The figures given in sections 5.3–5.4 are presented using descriptive statistics, without reference to significance, which is reasonable since no statistical analysis applies to them. However, results presented in cross-tables include significance levels (Figures 5a–e).

5.2 Analysis of responses to the questionnaire

The participants' responses (obtained via Google Form) were exported to Excel by one of the researchers (Jeppsson) to import into IBM SPSS. After processing, seven duplicates (of the original 359) were removed, leaving a total of 352 respondents, and the multiple-

choice questions were converted into dichotomous variables. These steps enabled further statistical analysis.

As a starting point, descriptive statistics were produced on gender, age, and the types of choirs the participants conducted. Information about the organisations where they led choirs, along with the ages of their choristers, also formed the basis for the sample description. Furthermore, we identified the participants' experiences of singing in choirs during their youth and how they were leading and conducting their choirs at the time of this study.

The next step in the analysis was to examine the relationships between the participants' current working approaches and their experiences of such approaches during their youth. These relations were explored using cross-reference tables. Finally, we processed the data to identify and analyse patterns, categorising the questionnaire responses and analysing the quantitative results accordingly. This analysis resulted in five distinct categories, which are presented under results (6.1-6.5).

5.3 Participants - description of sample

The questionnaire was distributed via ten choir organisations to choir leaders in Sweden. These organisations were: Föreningen Sveriges Körledare, Sveriges Körförbund, UNGiKÖR, Körcentrum Syd, Körcentrum Väst, Sensus studieförbund, Sveriges Kyrkosångsförbund, Körledarnas Riksförbund, Kyrkomusikernas Riksförbund, and Kören som växtplats. It was also distributed among associated choir leader members in various closed Facebook groups. Since the survey was distributed in open choir leader forums – even if the groups were closed – it is impossible to determine how many choir leaders had access to the questionnaire, which means the exact response rate cannot be specified. However, the decision to distribute the questionnaire widely made it possible to reach many choir leaders, which was a priority. As an overall criterion for participation was self-identification as a choir leader, we consider the risk of non-choir leaders completing the questionnaire to be low. Due to the non-random nature of the sample, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive of this group rather than generalisable to all choir leaders in Sweden.

A total of 352 choir leaders participated in the survey. Of these, 23% identified as male, 76% as female, and 2 individuals chose not to disclose their gender. In terms of age, 15% of participants were under 40, 0.3% were under 20, 2.3% were aged 20–29, and 12.3% were aged 30–39. Additionally, 25% were aged 40–49, 46% were aged 50–64, and 14% were 65 or older. This means that 85% of the participants were over the age of 40.

Based on the responses, 67% of the 352 choir leaders led choirs in the Church of Sweden, 21% in nonconformist congregations, 46% in compulsory or upper-secondary schools, 28% in community schools of music and arts, 38% in study associations, and 35% in independent organisations. In total, 55% of the participants stated that they led choirs in some form of school. Many participants reported being active in more than one of these organisations, which together represent the spectrum of different cultural environments in this study.

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The participants were asked to state the age range of the choristers they lead. 8% reported leading choristers aged 0–5 years, 35% aged 6–9, 37% aged 10–13, 27% aged 14–16 and 37% aged 17–25. 85% of the choir leaders conducted choristers over 25 years of age. In total, 64% of reported leading at least one choir with choristers aged 0–25, meaning they lead choirs that may be classified as children's and/or youth choirs. This indicates that many of the choir leaders work with two or more of the age groups.

5.4 Participants' experiences of cultural environments

A majority of the participants had sung in choirs since early childhood and throughout various stages of their lives. Regarding choir leaders' experiences of singing in children's choirs in different contexts, 59% of the 352 participants indicated that they had sung in a children's choir³ in compulsory schools, 21% in community schools of music and arts, 61% in children's choirs in the Church of Sweden, and 21% in nonconformist congregations. 15% reported no participation in children's choirs at all. Schools and churches appear as two environments where many participants had their earliest experiences of choir singing.

According to the participants, their experience of singing in *youth choirs* was predominantly situated in schools and churches, with 53% having sung in high schools and 63% in upper-secondary school. 9% answered that they had not sung in a youth choir as teenagers. The data show that the majority of choir leaders had been involved in choir singing during their youth in different environments.

When it comes to experiences from singing in *adult choirs*, only 2% of participants reported that they had never sung in an adult choir. 70% had such experiences in the Church of Sweden. 21% in nonconformist congregations, 47% in folk high schools, and 68% in college/university choirs.

A picture of the participants' experiences of choir singing throughout their earlier years emerges from these findings: experiences of singing in children's choirs, youth choirs, and adult choirs in different environments. 15% had not sung in a children's choir, a figure that decreases to 9% for youth choirs. Only 2% had never sung in a choir for adults.

Thus, the analysis of the participating choir leaders' experiences of their own singing in choirs shows some central cultural environments, with *schools* and *churches* being dominant. Notably, the majority had participated in choir singing in high school and in upper-secondary-school, indicating that choir activities were accessible during their schooling. Regarding adult choirs, four strong cultural environments were identified: folk high schools (47%), college/university (68%), the Church of Sweden (70%), and nonconformist congregations (21%). Responses related to the Church of Sweden showed high participation in children's choirs (61%), a percentage that decreased during youth (49%) but increased again in adult choirs (70%).

³ The numbers indicating participation in child choirs in community schools of music and arts, the Church of Sweden and nonconformist congregations may be slightly overrated, since the formulation of the question might be open to misunderstandings. Some respondents may have indicated choir experiences in general, and not specifically child choirs.

6. Results

In this section, the mapping out of the relationship between choir leaders' current practices and their experiences of choral singing during their youth are presented in five categories: (1) Assembling choir leader education; (2) Mediating tools in choir singing during childhood and youth; (3) Mediating tools in choir leadership; (4) The use of mediating tools past and present; and (5) Perceived preparedness for choir leading. The final section provides a summary of the results.

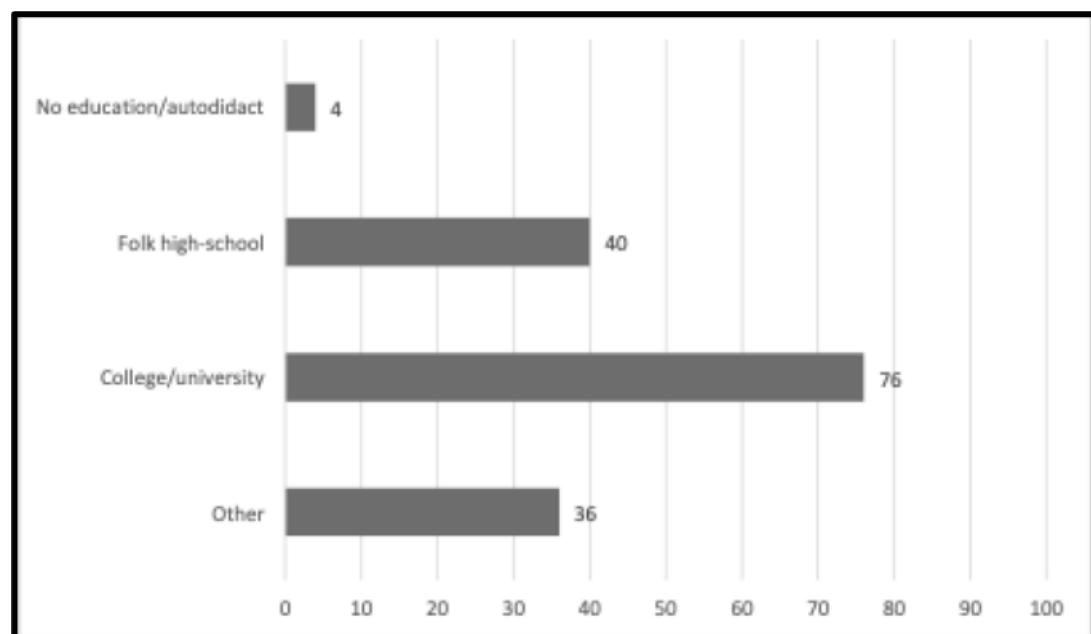


Figure 2: Choir leaders' educational background.

6.1 Assembling choir leader education

In the questionnaire, we asked the participants who work with children and youth choirs about their educational background (see Figure 2). 352 answered this part of the questionnaire, which included open-ended responses. 4% reported having no formal music education and being self-taught, 40% had attended folk high school, and 76% had a college or university education.

The choir leaders in this study had followed a number of educational paths of varying length, all of which had prepared them for choir leading. The majority reported that they had a college or university education. The open-ended responses pointed out a wide variety of environments, characterised by individuals compiling their own mix of courses and education. These results indicate that there is no single path to becoming a choir leader; rather, each individual chooses their own way among numerous possibilities.

38% (133 participants) provided additional information in open-ended answers. Of these, 35 stated that they do not currently work with children or youth choirs and also reported no relevant education. Four individuals answered that they do not work with children's or youth choirs but still reported some education. Collectively, these 133

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responses indicate the wide range of environments where their participation in adult choirs had taken place, including barbershop ensembles, female choirs, double quartets, chamber choirs, church choirs, male choirs, opera choirs, secular choirs, sacred choirs, student choirs, theatre choirs, vocal ensembles, and choirs defined by genre, such as rock and gospel choirs.

Participants were encouraged to provide detailed accounts of their education in open-ended answers. 94 of the 352 respondents described a considerable variety of educational experiences, both short and long. These included: music teacher, choir courses, shorter or longer college studies in choir pedagogies, cantor education, organist education, master's degree education in Sweden and abroad, choir leader education at basic and advanced levels, choir leader education in Sweden and abroad, summer courses, private singing lessons, single courses in choir leading for children, university or college courses in music theory and musicology, workshops, YouTube tutorials, learning by singing in choirs, shadowing conductors, rhythmic pedagogical methodology, diplomas in conducting, private conducting lessons, folk high schools, choir leading courses in study associations, choir leader education, choir leader education within church organisations, pedagogical education for children's and youth choirs, and further training in methodology for children's choirs.

Open-ended answers reveal how choir leaders have constructed their education throughout their lives in different formal and informal contexts, as in these two examples:

I have put together my own choir education by choosing courses during my folk high school and music college years. The folk high school gave me more education directed against amateur choirs within the church. (Open-ended answer to question 35.)

No education/autodidact. Want to problematize the expression autodidact - no education. Autodidact means that you are educated, but through other paths than what is normatively considered as education. (Open-ended answer to question 15.)

These excerpts illustrate the participants' perceptions of the formal and informal environments and paths that may serve as preparation for choir leading. Regarding their own education in choirs and choir leading, the answers show significant variation. However, a majority of participants have higher education. The open-ended answers also reveal that shorter courses in choir leading, significant experience of choir singing, and several other experiences have contributed to their competence. Viewed as a whole, the participants created the impression of comprehensive choir singing and choir leading experiences, along with the fact that they had assembled their own educational opportunities. The excerpts below, quoted from two open-ended answers, exemplify more of these winding paths:

I am mainly autodidact and have learned what I need from my father who was an (amateur) choir leader in a nonconformist congregation for 40 years, and by singing a lot in choirs when I was young. (Open-ended answer to question 35.)

For me, who was especially interested in choir, that education was not enough, so I had to educate myself elsewhere, partly through choir leader courses, partly by learning from people already in the profession. (Open-ended answer to question 36.)

These excerpts indicate that participants have experience of choir singing and choir leading, and that they have assembled a choir leader education of their own through both formal and informal learning paths.

6.2 Mediating tools in choir singing during childhood and youth

Regarding the mandatory question about mediating tools used in choir rehearsals during participants' childhood and youth, the piano emerged as the dominant mediating tool: 94% reported that their choir leaders used the piano. A cappella singing also featured strongly at 60%. Thus, these two mediating tools were central to the choir leaders' own childhood and youth experiences of choir singing (see Figure 3). Only 3% of respondents professed that they had no choir singing experiences during this period.

Piano and a cappella singing appear as the dominant mediating tools, made familiar to the participants during their own choir singing in their childhood and youth.

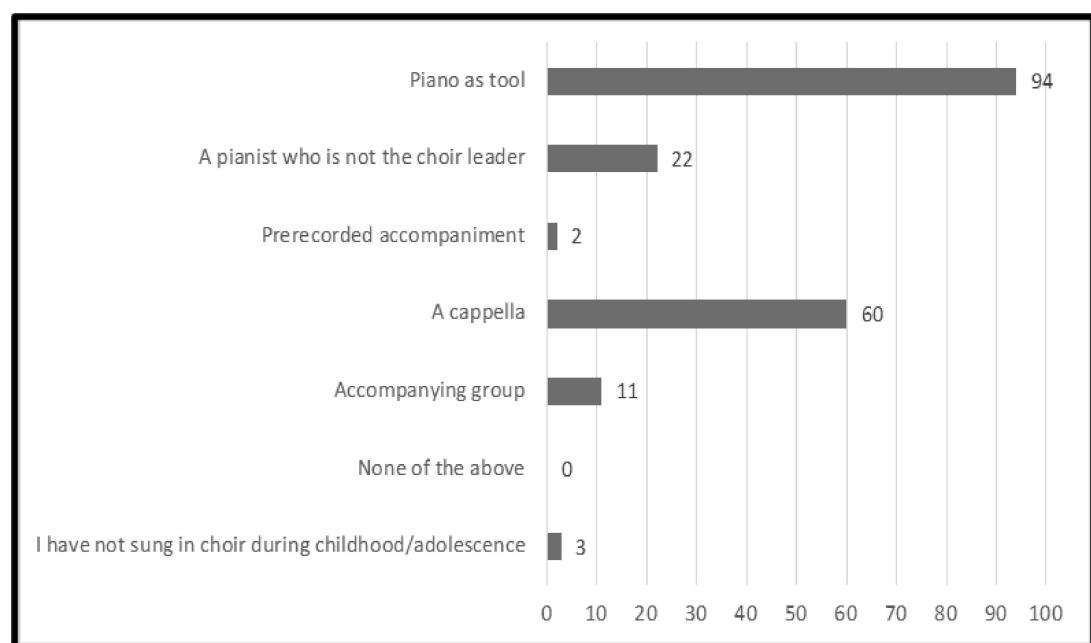


Figure 3: Mediating tools in choir singing during childhood and youth.

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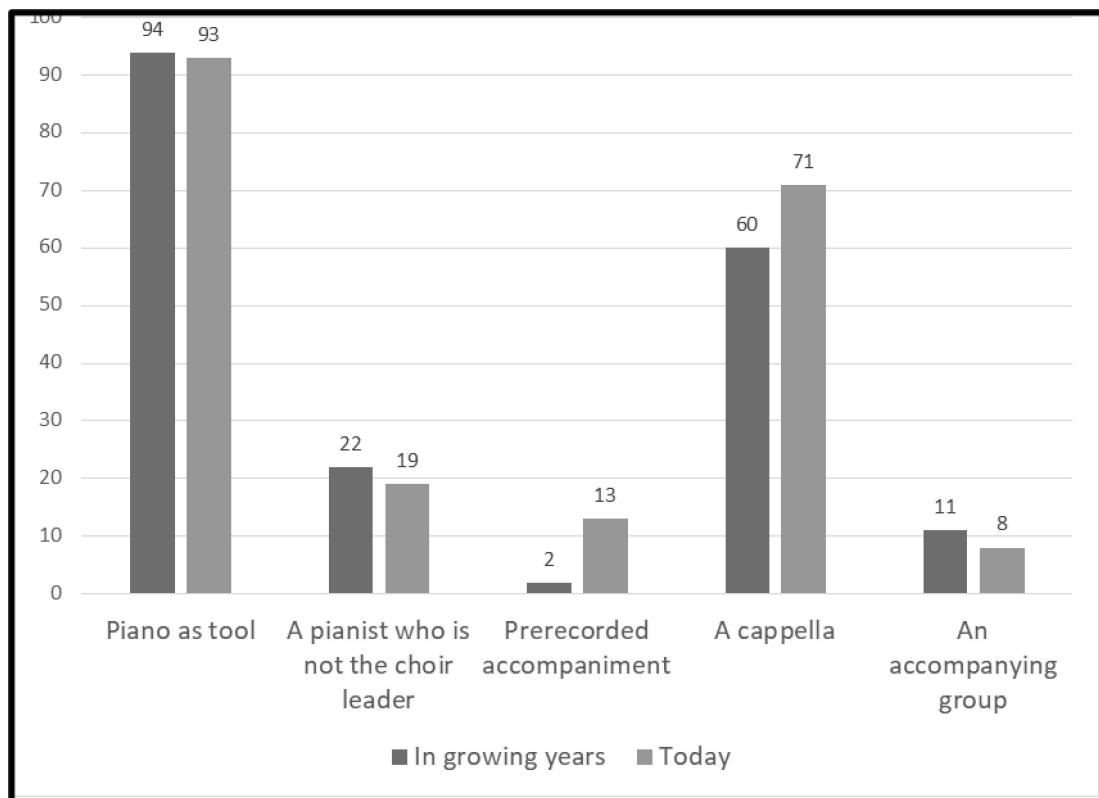


Figure 4(a): Five mediating tools used at rehearsals during the choir leaders' childhood and youth, and in their current use.

6.3 Mediating tools in choir leadership

From the survey, piano and a cappella singing stood out as the two dominant mediating tools currently used by choir leaders. The results (see Figure 4a) show that, at the time of this study, 93% of participants worked with the piano and 71% used a cappella singing. The responses showed that the piano holds a strong position both in the participants' childhood and youth experiences and in their current choir rehearsals.

94% of participants reported the use of piano as a mediating tool during rehearsals when they were young, and 93% currently use the piano (see Figure 4a). These percentages describe generalised levels and is not linked to individual choir leaders. Out of the participants, 60% stated that they rehearsed a cappella in their youth, and 71% still use this tool in rehearsals. When asked about hiring a pianist who is not the choir leader, the numbers were 22% in the past and 19% at the time of the survey. Rehearsals with an accompanying ensemble group were reported by 11% in the past and 8% currently. The use of prerecorded accompaniment increased from 2% in the past to the current 13% (see Figure 4a). Figure 4b below presents a general comparison between the choir leaders' previous experience of mediating tools in rehearsals during their childhood and youth, and their current use of these tools.

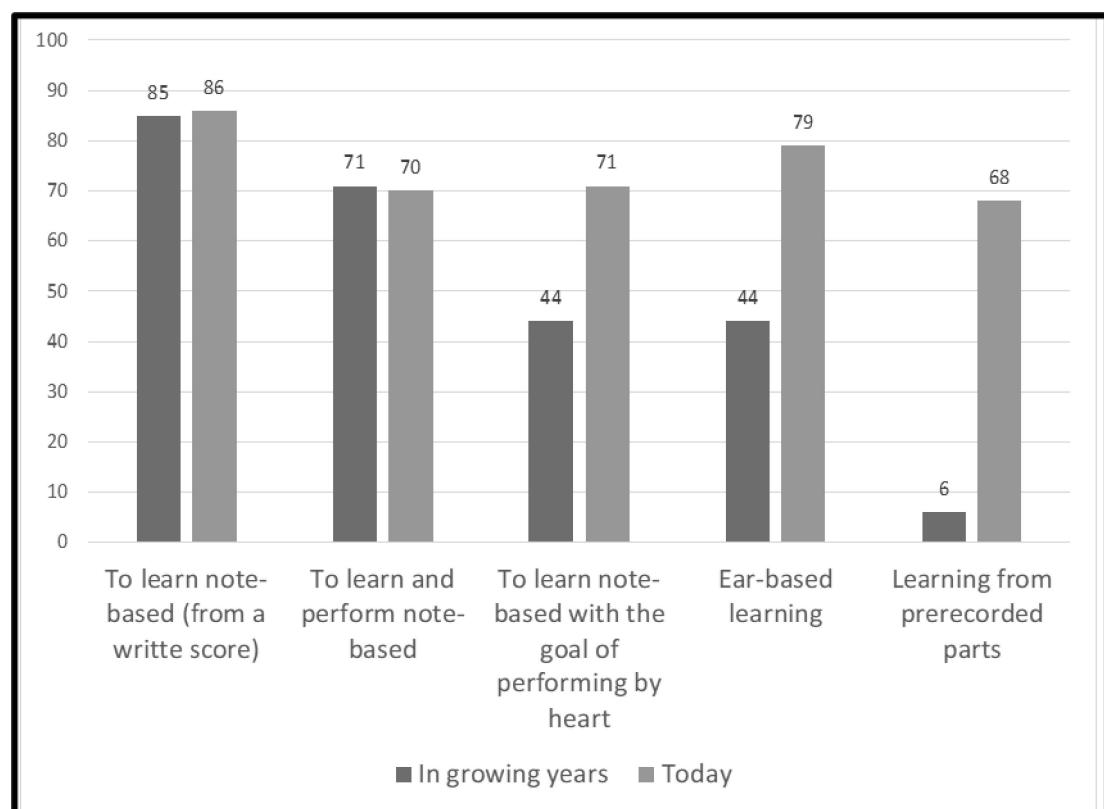


Figure 4(b): Five mediating tools used at rehearsals during the choir leaders' childhood and youth, and their current use.

At the time of this study, five mediating tools appeared to be used more evenly (68–86%) in participants' work (see Figure 4b), which contrasts with their earlier experiences (6–85%). Notable changes are the use of prerecorded voice parts for rehearsals, ear-based learning, and note-based rehearsals for performing repertoire by heart (memorised). This will be expanded on below.

Based on responses from all 352 participants concerning mediating tools in choir leading, note-based learning in general (past: 85%, current: 86%) and note-based learning for note-based performances (past: 71%, current: 70%) appear to have remained relatively unchanged between participants' learning experiences during their youth and their current teaching practice. Note-based learning for performance by heart (past: 44%, current: 71%) and training by ear (past: 44%, current: 79%) appear to have become more common. The mediating tool that shows the greatest increase is prerecorded voice parts for rehearsals (past: 6%, current: 68%), which now seems to be used noticeably more often than in the past.

At a group level, the results suggest that note-based teaching and learning has retained its position as a widely used mediating tool, while ear-based teaching and learning appears to be more common now than in the past. The findings also indicate that the piano and a cappella singing were commonly used in participants' childhood and youth, as well as in their current choir leading practice.

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6.4 The use of mediating tools in the past and current

Based on cross-reference tables, Figures 5a–e below illustrate the association between participants' past experience of specific mediating tools (independent variable) and their current use of these tools in choir leading (dependent variable). Participants who currently use a specific mediating tool are grouped according to whether they previous experience of that tool during their youth.

Although, the results cannot be generalised to all choir leaders in Sweden, within this sample the association between having being taught with sheet music in the past and currently using the same method is statistically significant $\chi^2(1, N = 352) = 27.17, p < .005, \phi = .28$. Among participants without previous experience of sheet music, 63.5% currently use it music during rehearsals, compared to 90.3% of those with experience of using sheet music during rehearsals in the past (See Figure 5a).

			Use sheet music in current rehearsals			
			Yes	No	Total	
Experience of sheet music in rehearsal in the past	Yes	Count	271	29	300	
		% Within Experience of...	90,3%	9,7%	100%	
	No	Count	33	19		
		% Within Experience of...	63,5%	36,5%	100%	
Total		Count	304	48	352	
		% Within Experience of...	86,4%	13,5%	100%	

Figure 5(a): Relationship between participants' experience of sheet music in rehearsal in the past and current use in rehearsals.

Furthermore, within this sample, the relation between previous experience of using a mediating tool (learning tool, or choral score) for performances and current practices is statistically significant $\chi^2(1, N = 352) = 14.01, p < .005, \phi = .20$. Among participants without prior experience of using musical notation (or notated material, or choral score, or vocal parts) for performances, 55.9% currently use this mediating tool, while 76.0% of those who had learned this tool as young choristers still use it (see Figure 5b).

			Use sheet music in current rehearsals for performance with sheet music			
			Yes	No	Total	
Experience of sheet music in rehearsal in the past for performance with sheet music	Yes	Count	190	60	250	
		% Within Experience of...	76,0%	24,0%	100%	
	No	Count	57	45	102	
		% Within Experience of...	55,9%	44,1%	100%	
Total		Count	247	105	352	
		% Within Experience of...	70,2%	29,8%	100%	

Figure 5(b): Relationship between past and present practices in the use of sheet music during rehearsals for performances.

The relationship between participants' previous and current experiences of using sheet music in rehearsals for performances by heart is also statistically significant $\chi^2(1, N = 352) = 16.03, p < .005, \phi = .21$. Of those without prior experience, 62.4% currently use this mediating tool, compared to 81.9% of those who were trained with sheet music for performances by heart (see Figure 5c).

			Use sheet music in rehearsal for performance by heart today			
			Yes	No	Total	
Experience of sheet music in rehearsal in the past for performance by heart	Yes	Count	127	28	155	
		% Within Experience of...	81,9%	18,1%	100%	
	No	Count	123	74		
		% Within Experience of...	62,4%	37,6%	100%	
Total		Count	250	102	352	
		% Within Experience of...	71,0%	29,0%	100%	

Figure 5(c): Relationship between earlier approaches to preparing performances by heart using notated scores (or printed score) and the ways such rehearsals are conducted today.

Similarly, the relation between experiences of rehearsal by heart in the past and current experiences of rehearsals by heart is statistically significant within this sample, $\chi^2(1, N = 352) = 20.40, p < .005, \phi = .24$. Among participants without experience of learning repertoire by heart in their youth, 69.9% currently use this mediating tool, compared to 89.7% of those familiar with it from youth (see Figure 5d).

			Use of rehearsal by heart today			
			Yes	No	Total	
Experience of rehearsal by heart in the past	Yes	Count	140	16	156	
		% Within Experience of...	89,7%	10,3%	100%	
	No	Count	137	59	196	
		% Within Experience of...	69,9%	36,5%	100%	
Total		Count	277	75	352	
		% Within Experience of...	78,7%	21,3%	100%	

Figure 5(d): Relationship between the experience of rehearsal by heart in the past and current experiences of rehearsals by heart.

Finally, the relationship between learning a cappella singing during their youth and current use in their choir leading is the strongest observed in this sample, $\chi^2(1, N = 352) = 49.38$,

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$p < .005$, $\phi = .38$. Of those without prior experience, 50.7% currently use this mediating tool, while 85.2% of those who trained in a cappella singing continue to use it (see Figure 5e).

			Use of a cappella rehearsal today			
			Yes	No	Total	
Experience of a cappella rehearsal in the past	Yes	Count	179	31	210	
		% Within Experience of...	85,2%	14,8%	100%	
	No	Count	72	70	142	
		% Within Experience of...	50,7%	49,3%	100%	
Total		Count	251	101	352	
			% Within Experience of...	71,3%	28,7%	
					100%	

Figure 5(e): Relationship between experiences of a cappella rehearsals in the past and current a cappella rehearsals.

The results from the Figures 5a–e suggest a clear pattern within this sample: mediating tools learned during youth tend to be used in current choir leader practice.

	χ^2	df	N	p-value	ϕ	Strength of effect
Fig. 5(a) Relations between the experience of sheet music in rehearsal in the past and the current use of sheet music in rehearsals.	27.17	1	352	$p < .005$	.28	moderate
Fig. 5(b) Relationship between the experience of sheet music in rehearsals for performances with sheet music in the past and the current use of sheet music in rehearsal for performances with sheet music.	14.01	1	352	$p < .005$	.20	small
Fig. 5(c) Relationship between the experience of sheet music in rehearsal for performances by heart in the past and the current use of sheet music in rehearsal for performances by heart.	16.03	1	352	$p < .005$	.21	moderate

Fig. 5(d) Relations between the experience of rehearsal by heart in the past and current experiences of rehearsals by heart.	20.40	1	352	$p < .005$	.24	moderate
Fig. 5(e) Relations between the experience of a cappella rehearsals in the past and current a cappella rehearsals.	49.38	1	352	$p < .005$	.38	moderate

Figure 5(f): Summary of χ^2 , df, N, p-value, Φ and strength of effect of relations reported in Figures 5a–e.

The strength of the association between the use of specific mediating tools in the participants' past and their current use in choir leading varies between $\phi = 0.20$ and $\phi = 0.38$. The strongest relationship in Figures 5a–e concerns the use of a cappella. Since phi ϕ (phi) ranges from -1 to +1, with +1 indicating a perfect association, the values obtained in this study can be considered moderate. Nevertheless, interpreting ϕ as a measure of association is not always unambiguous; (it should be regarded as a complement to the percentage distributions presented in tables (Djurfeldt et al., 2010). However, given the non-random sample, these measures are best understood as descriptive of this group rather than as generalisable to all choir leaders in Sweden.

As the primary concern of this study is interpreting relations in choir leaders' practices rather than the exact strength of statistical evidence, results are reported in terms of significance levels ($p < .005$) rather than exact p-values. This approach provides clarity while remaining appropriate to the study's pedagogical context. Within this sample, participants who learned with sheet music as choristers in their youth currently use sheet music as a mediating tool more than those who lack this experience. Similarly, those who had learned by heart tend to use this mediating tool in their current choir rehearsals – a pattern that also applies to a cappella singing.

6.5 Perceived preparedness for choir leading in their current practice

This section presents a compilation of choir leader competencies and the participants' perceived preparedness regarding how well their choir education had prepared them for choir leading in their current practice.

The participants were asked how well their choir leading education had prepared them for choir leading without reference to specific competencies. The result, shown in Figure 6 below, is of a general nature and cannot be related to any specific education. This was a mandatory question in the questionnaire, meaning that self-taught choir leaders and individuals with lower levels of training also responded. The participants graded their answers on a scale of 1–6, where 1 stands for "not at all" and 6 stands for "very well".

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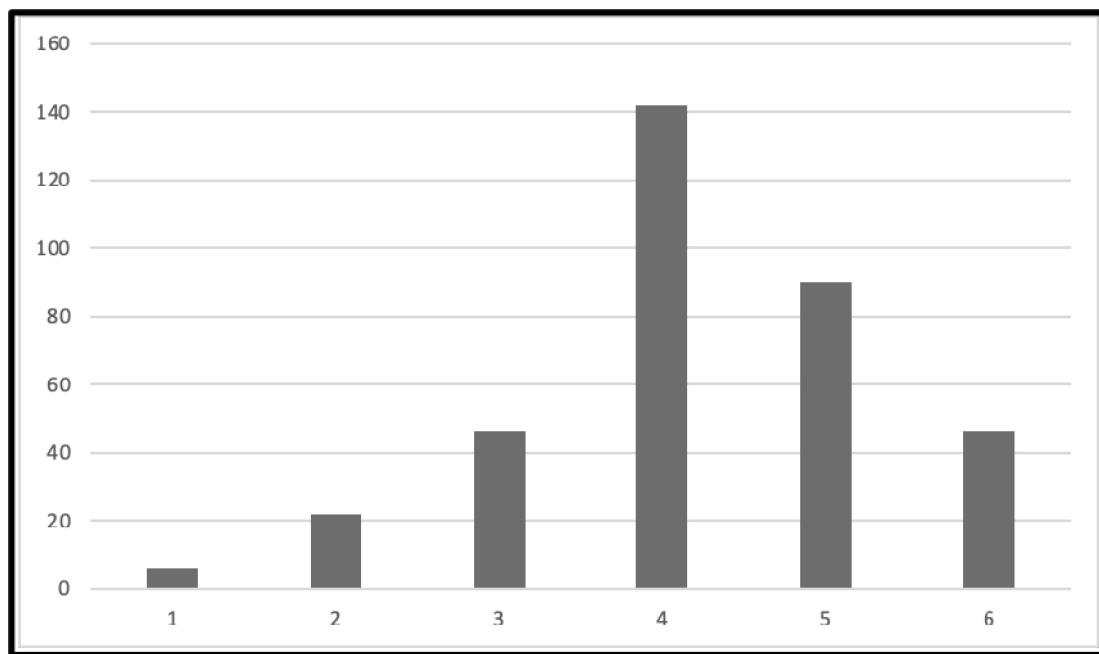


Figure 6: How well their education has prepared them for choir leading.

The majority of the participants answered that their choir education had prepared them well for the demands of choir leading: 2% stated that their education had not prepared them at all, 6% stated that they had been prepared to a small degree, 13% felt sufficiently prepared, 40% answered that they had been fairly prepared, 26% felt that they had been prepared well, and 13% claimed that they had been prepared very well.

Figure 7 below presents a compilation of a number of choir leader competencies. The participants were given the opportunity to grade these competencies to reflect how well they had been prepared for each competence. The listing goes from the highest to the lowest mean value. This was a mandatory question in the questionnaire, so all 352 participants answered, including those who are self-taught and those with lower levels of training. The participants rated their perceived preparedness in different choir leading competencies on a scale from 1 to 6, with 1 indicating a lack of preparedness and 6 indicating the highest level of preparedness. The mean value was 4.21 ($SD = 1.13$). However, given the nature of the scale, these values should be interpreted with caution.

To what degree did your choir leading education prepare you in the following competences?	Medium value	Standard deviation
Understanding for different voices and voice range	4.18	1.33
Preparedness to work with the choir singers' ability to read notes	3.53	1.44
Competence to direct and lead with different conducting techniques for different genres	3.47	1.59
Knowledge of repertoires from different genres	3.39	1.21
Preparedness to work ear-based	3.25	1.44
Competence to meet and work with children and youngsters	3.25	1.48
Competence to accompany in different genres	3.22	1.43
Competence about children's voices and breaking voices	3.19	1.48
To arrange/project lead concerts and performances	3.01	1.48
Knowledge of repertoires with children and youngsters as target groups	2.93	1.31
Knowledge about cognitive, physical and social developments among children and youngsters	2.84	1.50
To work with scenic performances and choreography	2.47	1.43
To cooperate across art forms and with different actors	2.34	1.41
Preparedness to meet people/choir singers with different cultural backgrounds	1.98	1.25
Preparedness to meet parents/guardians and relatives to children and youngsters	1.96	1.25

Figure 7: Compilation of perceived preparedness in different choir leading competencies, graded by the participants in relation to how well their education had prepared them for choir leading.

The first line in Figure 7 shows the highest mean score. The average score of 4.18 indicates that understanding different voices and vocal range is a competence for which the participants feel well prepared. Subsequent lines present other competencies in descending order of mean value and are commented upon below. The same applies to their ability to work with the choristers' ability to read notes (3.53) and their ability to lead with different techniques for different genres (3.47). The aspects for which the participants felt least prepared and competent are the meetings with parents or guardians and relatives of children and young people (1.96) and meeting people or choristers with different cultural backgrounds (1.98). When it comes to cooperation across artistic genres with different actors (2.34) and working with scenic performances and choreography (2.47),

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the participants answered that they felt prepared to a lesser degree. In the middle range, between 2.84 and 3.39, we found competencies that involved: knowledge of repertoires from different genres, preparedness to work using an ear-based approach, competence to meet and work with children and adolescents, accompanying different genres, knowledge about children's voices and changing adolescent voices, arranging projects, lead concerts and performances, knowledge of suitable repertoire for children and adolescents, and knowledge about cognitive, physical and social developments among children and adolescents.

These answers (see Figure 7) provide a view of the participants' ideas about how well prepared they believe they are in the specified competencies or fields. For example, the participants generally report being well prepared when it comes to vocal ranges and reading notes – competencies that can be linked to subject knowledge. However, perceptions about their preparedness and competence for meeting parents or guardians and choristers from different cultural backgrounds, which can be linked to psychosocial and/or relational knowledge were less pronounced. 62% of the participants reported that they had no or very little experience of working and performing scenically with choirs (no experience: 10%, little experience: 52%), while 35% answered that they had considerable experience. The data show that 34% of the participants view their choir leader assignment as both work and a spare-time activity. Therefore, choir leadership shows traits of spare-time activity, even when practised as a full-time profession.

As stated earlier, the results of this study show that some participants have a college or university education in music, while others are self-taught or have acquired choir leader competencies in informal ways. The paths taken to become a choir leader appear to be both formal and informal and consist of a variety of longer and shorter educational experiences and courses, as well as learning in different environments. Therefore, the results seen in Figures 6 and 7 cannot be connected to specific choir leader educations, nor to choir leader education in general.

6.6 Summary of results

The results indicate that, within this sample, schools and churches are the predominant learning environments for choir leaders. Within these cultural environments, the piano and a cappella singing as mediating tools are frequently used, both during the choir leaders' past and in their current practice. Generally, these conductors continue to use the tools they encountered in their early choir experiences. However, the use of prerecorded voice parts has increased, which contrasts with the trend of relying on tools experienced during their upbringing. The results also reveal that conductors have integrated their education through various formal and informal contexts throughout their lives. Participants reported feeling well-prepared in areas related to subject knowledge, but they reported feeling less prepared when interacting with parents and choristers from diverse cultural backgrounds. They also indicated that they felt less competent when working and performing with choirs, related to psychosocial and relational knowledge.

7 Discussion

The present study maps out and considers the relationships between choir directors' current practices and their experiences of choral singing during their youth. The discussion is structured under six subheadings: Cultural practices, Mediating tools, The path to choir leadership, Competencies, Limitations of the study. Lastly, Implications – for the field and for the future are discussed.

7.1 Cultural practices

The results indicate two dominant learning environments for choir leaders' cultural practices: school and church, which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Jansson et al., 2018; Jansson and Balsnes, 2020a). More than half of the participants reported having sung in a youth choir in high school or upper-secondary school, suggesting that schools constitute a strong environment for choir singing. According to the responses, only 9% of participants had never sung in any youth choir. The influence of these two cultural environments is evident in the participants' past and in their current choir practices.

The influence of the cultural environment of the churches is evident, as 67% of the participants currently lead choirs in the Church of Sweden and 21% in nonconformist congregations. This influence is further illustrated in the results by one participant's description of learning from their father, who "was an (amateur) choir leader in a nonconformist congregation for 40 years" (see quotations 6.1, p. 13). The same participant described this learning as a result of "singing a lot in choirs when I was young". Furthermore, different schools remain cultural environments that play an important role in developing choir leaders. As noted earlier, 55% of the participants lead choirs within school environments, indicating that choirs are currently part of the cultural environment of schools.

With regards to the results, we have to consider a number of different types of schools (high schools/senior level, upper-secondary schools, folk high schools). Strong, predominant environments for choir singing are, as we can see, churches and educational institutions. Thus, this notion refers to schools and churches in a broader sense.

7.2 Mediating tools

When choir leaders marked the mediating tools they use in rehearsals and those used during their youth, two stood out: piano and a cappella singing. This finding aligns with previous research (Bygdéus, 2015, 2018) and confirms that these are key tools in choir leadership. Cross-reference tables (Figures 5a–e) and the bar charts reveal a strong relationship between the tools used in youth and those in current leadership within this sample.

Additionally, choir leaders trained with note-based teaching tend to rely more on sheet music than those without such experience. Similarly, those who learned by ear tend to use ear-based teaching, as seen with a cappella singing (see Figure 5e). This aligns with previous research (Prosser et al., 2008) and Rogoff's (2003) view on cultural influence in learning. It can also be seen as an example of Rogoff's (2003) suggestion that people are

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not only influenced by culture but also develop through cultural practices as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities. These cultural activities then evolve through the participation of people in subsequent generations. Vygotsky's (1923/2006) belief that the human mind is full of the voices of other humans, often referred to as collective memory, is worth mentioning in relation to these findings. The results indicating that participants use the kind of mediating tools that were used during their youth can also be seen as an example of how both past, present, and future generations interact with culture – an interaction that transcends time and space. This can also be seen as teaching the way you were taught – a phenomenon documented in several fields by scholars such as Gumm (2004) and Varvarigou (2016).

At the group level, the results show that note-based teaching and learning has maintained its place as a frequently used teaching tool, while ear-based teaching and learning has increased in use. The use of prerecorded voice parts for rehearsal seems to have increased considerably. This may relate to the development and general use of digital tools, where they in society and today's choirs have a place that they did not have in the past. We interpret this as an action to include singers with less theoretical musical knowledge, as informal learning can be seen as more self-directed, which is facilitated by digital tools. Furthermore, the growth of aural teaching and learning can be seen as an example of how cultural activities advance through interaction with future generations (Rogoff, 2003). The rise of prerecorded voices in current choral rehearsals can also be linked to the needs associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, as suggested by Daffern and others (2021) and Kerry (2022). Although the pandemic is (hopefully) past, the mediation tools developed 2020–2022 should remain useful and complement other mediation tools. Although the intention behind informal learning with prerecorded parts can be seen as inclusive, questions may be raised about lowered expectations of choristers' ability to read music. It is possible that less note-based learning may limit the repertoire and range of genres that choirs can perform, but exploring this issue lies beyond the scope of this study.

7.3 The path to choir leadership

The results show that the choral leaders have diverse educational backgrounds and experiences. Their musical competencies have been developed in learning communities, often from an early age. Rather than being the result of specific training, choral leadership skills appear to emerge from a self-directed journey through both formal and informal learning environments.

Based on the results, we suggest that the learning paths of choral leaders could be seen as interactive systems involving the learner, the environment, and the subject (Gumm, 2004; Cooper, 2017). Furthermore, this learning path is connected to both formal and informal learning environments (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2002, 2008; Jaffurs, 2004; Mak, 2004). The role of socio-cultural practice, as highlighted by Varvarigou and Durrant (2011), is also crucial in this process. Thus, this study indicates that musical experiences in childhood and youth influence choral leadership, regardless of subsequent formal or informal training (Prosser et al., 2008).

7.4 Competencies

Responding to the questionnaire, participants rated how well their education had prepared them in various competencies. The result indicate that participants felt confident in their subject knowledge but less prepared for interacting with parents and choristers from diverse cultural backgrounds. In other words, choral conductors have strong musical and technical competence but weaker situational and relational competence. This finding is consistent with previous research that has identified relational skills as lacking in choral conducting education (Jansson et al., 2018; Jansson et al., 2019a, 2019b; Jansson and Balsnes, 2020a, 2020b).

As shown in Figure 7, participants in this sample reported being relatively well prepared for choir leadership, with an average preparedness rating of 4.21 on a 1–6 scale. However, socio-psychological and relational competencies scored below 2 on the scale, indicating a significant gap. One possible explanation is that participants view these skills as naturally acquired through practice rather than through formal education (Varvarigou and Durrant, 2011). Jansson and others (2019a) stress the tendency of choir leaders to disparage the importance of competencies they do not possess. Our study does not point to any tendency to disparage socio-psychological and relational competencies, even though the participants reported lower preparedness for these competencies. From the perspective of Varvarigou and Durrant (2011), the perceived lack of socio-psychological and relational aspects in choir leadership education can be understood somewhat differently. Varvarigou and Durrant describe conducting education as divided into distinct stages: the first stage involves fundamental technical skills, practice and developed acquisition, while more communicative possibilities are included in the subsequent transformative phase. Varvarigou and Durrant (2011) also acknowledge social and cultural accounts. It is possible that the participants in the present study went through the first stages of choir director training without moving on to the subsequent transformative phase.

7.5 Limitations of the study

This study is based on a sample with self-selection, as participants chose to respond after the questionnaire was distributed widely through networks and organisations. The approach means that the sample mainly reflects those who opted in rather than the entire population of choir leaders, which should be considered in generalising the findings. A further limitation concerns the disproportionate age and gender distribution among participants. Of the 352 respondents, 76% were women, 85% were over 40 years old, and 67% were active in the Church of Sweden. This indicates that the majority of participants were trained in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, so the findings do not reflect the current situation of learning environments in choral conducting education.

The participants had access to the questionnaire through various networks and organisations and identified themselves as choir leaders. However, they may not fully represent the entire population of choir leaders in Sweden. The question may be asked: Why did so few of the younger choir leaders respond? A possible explanation could be that younger choir leaders have fewer contacts with established networks for choir leaders

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(where the questionnaire was distributed) compared to older choir leaders. We cannot rule out that there are fewer choir leaders under the age of 40, which may indicate that the content of the educational institutions where younger choir leaders receive their training differs from that of some 30 years ago. The research question, formulated “What is the relationship between choir leaders' current practices and their experiences of choral singing during their youth?”, is based on the choir leaders' experiences, meaning that the survey answers rely on their subjective memories of their own experiences.

Furthermore, the participants indicated the extent to which they felt their education had prepared them for the necessary skills by rating competencies on a scale (1–6, with 1 indicating a lack of competence and 6 indicating the highest level of competence). However, a challenge emerged during the analytical process due to significant variation in individual educational backgrounds, making it difficult to analyse the data with complete certainty. Some choir leaders are self-taught, with no formal music or conducting education, while others have specialised training. Consequently, this part of the analysis cannot be linked directly to specific programmes or specific competencies. Nevertheless, it provides an overview of how choir leaders perceive their education's effectiveness in preparing them for choir leading.

According to the results in this study, there is – at least within this sample – a relationship between singing in school choirs during childhood and youth and becoming a choir leader. If this is the case, one reason for younger choir leaders' absence among the participants could be that strong learning environments for choir singing –schools and churches –have weakened.

Because of the relatively open distribution of the survey, it was impossible to state how many people were reached and, consequently, to establish the response rate. The advantage of the open distribution was that it resulted in a high number of participants. Most questions in the survey were mandatory, which could have been clarified at the beginning of the survey description.

Presenting the results has been challenging because of the large volume of data from the survey, which included both fixed and open-ended questions. This complexity made the presentation potentially overwhelming, though it also provided rich insights. The results could have been even more comprehensive if the qualitative data had been fully analysed, but the majority of it has been reserved for a separate study. For clarity, the results presented here were carefully selected to align with the research question.

7.6 Implications – for the field and for the future

The results show that, within this sample, choir leaders' current methods often stem from their early experiences in choral singing. Similarly, today's conductors influence future choir leadership. This highlights how cultural participation shapes working approaches, which evolve as each generation contributes to the tradition (Vygotsky, 1923/2006; Wertsch, 1985; Rogoff, 2003).

According to Vygotsky (1978), signs and symbols serve as key mediating tools. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of one's choice of tools, such as note-based or ear-based strategies for rehearsals and performances. As shown in this study and in previous research (Backman Bister, 2014), these choices can impact learners significantly.

Exploring a range of tools, such as tabs or colour notation for diverse learners and choristers, would be a valuable area for further research.

Further research could include in-depth interviews and a follow-up research project on open-ended responses omitted due to this study's scope. This would help explore how experienced choir leaders develop their skills. Additionally, studying younger choir leaders, especially those outside formal associations and networks, could provide valuable insights.

Given that choir leaders gain expertise by navigating various environments and communities, shaping both their identities and teaching methods, a long-term study would be valuable. Revisiting this research in 20 years could reveal how today's educational settings influence the next generation of choir leaders.

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Biographies

Anna Backman Bister, PhD, is a senior lecturer in Music Education at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden. She has worked as a teacher in music for 20 years and is also a special education teacher. Her field of interest is music education for children with special needs, special education music didactics, and combining research with work as a music teacher. Backman Bister is also active as a church musician.

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Maria Timoshenko-Nilsson, PhD in Music Education at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, is a professional choral conductor. She has led a variety of choirs and taught music at university level in Finland. Her research interests explore sight-reading in individual and group singing contexts, with a particular focus on singers' visual and perceptual processing of musical notation.

Pia Bygdéus, PhD, is a senior lecturer and researcher in Music Education at the Department of Artistic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Ingesund School of Music at Karlstad University, and serves as Research Secretary and Research Leader at The Royal Swedish Academy of Music. She leads the research project *Singing, health and well-being in school - a societal matter*. Her research interests are music education, musical learning, and musical leadership. Bygdéus is also active as a pianist, conductor, pedagogue, musician and répétiteur, both in her university role and as a freelancer.

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Appendix

Enkät till dig som är körledare

Det finns idag en del forskning om kör och körledning, men vi har ännu lite kunskap ur ett körledarutbildningsperspektiv. Formuläret tar endast några minuter att besvara. Undersökningen är anonym och materialet kommer endast att nyttjas i forskningssyfte.

Det finns inget rätt eller fel sätt att svara på frågorna, dock är vi genuint intresserade av din utbildningserfarenhet. Undersökningen är kvantitativ och vänder sig brett till körledare i Sverige.

Undersökningen ingår i forskningsprojektet "Lära köra kör" med de tre forskarna: Pia Bygdéus, PhD, universitetslektor i musikpedagogik, Linnéuniversitetet (Lnu) Cecilia Jeppsson, PhD, universitetslektor i pedagogik, Linnéuniversitetet (Lnu) Anna Backman Bister, PhD, universitetslektor i musikpedagogik, Kungl. Musikhögskolan (KMH)

Svarsalternativ i rutor innebär att flera svarsalternativ kan anges medan cirklar innebär att endast ett svar kan anges. Stjärna vid frågan innebär att det är obligatoriskt att svara. Precisera gärna dina svar under "Övrigt"!

Tack för din medverkan!

* Obligatorisk

1. Är du: *

Markera endast en oval.

- Kvinna
- Man
- Ickebinär
- Vill inte svara

2. Vilken åldersgrupp tillhör du? * *Markera endast en oval.*

- Under 20 år
- 20-29 år
- 30-39 år
- 40-49 år

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- 50-64 år
 - 65 år eller mer
3. I vilken slags organisation har du erfarenhet av att vara körledare? (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*
- Grundskola utan fördjupning inom musik
 - Grundskola med fördjupning inom musik
 - Gymnasium utan fördjupning inom musik
 - Gymnasium med fördjupning inom musik
 - Kulturskola
 - Svenska kyrkan
 - Frikyrkoförsamling
 - Studieförbund
 - Fristående organisation
- Egen regi
- Övrigt:
4. Arbetar du som körledare avlönat eller icke avlönat? * *Markera endast en oval.*
- Avlönat
 - Icke avlönat
 - Lika ofta avlönat som icke avlönat
5. Om du leder kör i egen regi, i vilken organisationsform sker det? (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) *Markera alla som gäller.*
- Enskild firma
 - Aktiebolag
 - Ideell förening
 - Jag leder inte kör i egen regi
- Övrigt:
6. Betraktar du ditt körledaruppdrag som ett arbete eller fritidsintresse? (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*
- Arbete
 - Fritid

- Både ock

Övrigt:

7. Vilka erfarenheter har du själv av att sjunga i kör? (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) *Sjungit i barnkör i... * Markera alla som gäller.*

- Grundskola
- Kulturskola
- Svenska kyrkan
- Frikyrkan
- Jag har inte sjungit i barnkör

Övrigt:

8. Sjungit i ungdomskör i... (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Högstadiet
- Gymnasiet
- Folkhögskola
- Kulturskola
- Svenska kyrkan
- Frikyrkan
- Jag har inte sjungit i ungdomskör

Övrigt:

9. Sjungit i vuxenkör i... (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Folkhögskola
- Högskola/Universitet
- Svenska kyrkan
- Frikyrkan
- Jag har inte sjungit i vuxenkör

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10. När det gäller körsång i din egen uppväxt har du som körsångare övervägande erfarenhet av: (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Notbaserat lärande
- Gehörsbaserat lärande
- Instudering med noter med framförande utantill som mål
- Instudering med noter med notbaserat framförande
- Lärande via inspelade övningsstämmor
- Inget av det ovan
- Jag har inte sjungit i kör i uppväxten

Övrigt:

11. Har körledaren i din uppväxt, vid repetition, arbetat med: (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Piano som verktyg
- En pianist som inte är körledaren
- Inspelat komp
- A cappella
- Kompgrupp
- Inget av det ovan
- Jag har inte sjungit i kör i uppväxten

Övrigt:

12. Hur arbetar du som körledare med dina körsångare? (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Notbaserat lärande
- Gehörsbaserat lärande
- Instudering med noter med framförande utantill som mål
- Instudering med noter med notbaserat framförande
- Lärande via inspelade övningsstämmor
- Inget av det ovan

Övrigt:

13. Arbetar du själv som körledare idag vid repetition med: (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Piano som verktyg

- En pianist som inte är körledaren
- Inspelat komp
- A cappella
- Kompgrupp
- Inget av det ovan

Övrigt:

14. Vilken är din erfarenhet som körledare av att arbeta och framträda sceniskt med körer? * *Markera endast en oval.*

- Ingen erfarenhet
- Lite erfarenhet
- Mycket erfarenhet

Övrigt:

15. Vilken utbildning har du som arbetar med barn- och ungdomskörer? (Precisera gärna din utbildning under "Övrigt".) (Flera svarsalternativ kan anges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Ingen utbildning/autodidakt
- Folkhögskola
- Högskola/Universitet

Övrigt:

16. Du som har gått folkhögskola: Har du fått utbildning i barn- och ungdomskörmetodik? *Markera endast en oval.*

- Nej
- Lite
- Mycket
- Jag har inte gått folkhögskola

Övrigt:

17. Du som har gått högskola/universitet: Har du fått utbildning i barn- och ungdomskörmetodik? *Markera endast en oval.*

- Nej

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- Lite
 - Mycket
 - Jag har inte gått högskola/universitet

Övrigt:

18. Vilken åldersgrupp tillhör körmedlemmarna i din/dina körer idag? (Flera svarsalternativ kan angges.) * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- 0-5 år
 - 6-9 år
 - 10-13 år
 - 14-16 år
 - 17-25 år
 - över 25 år

Frågor om din körledarutbildning

19. Hur väl motsvarade din körledarutbildning i stort det du själv upplever att yrkesrollen kräver? * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

20. I vilken grad förberedde dig din körledarutbildning inom följande kompetenser? Förståelse för olika röster och omfang * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

21. Kompetens om barnröster och målbrottsröster * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

22. Repertoarkändedom för målgruppen barn och ungdomar * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

23. Repertoarkändedom i många olika genrer * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

24. Kompetensen att dirigera och leda med olika dirigeringstekniker för olika genrer * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

25. Kompetens att ackompanjera i olika genrer * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

26. Beredskap att arbeta gehörsbaserat * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

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Inte alls Mycket väl

Mycket väl

27. Beredskap att arbeta med körsångarnas notläsningsförmåga *****
Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

28. Kompetensen att möta och arbeta med barn och ungdomar *
Markera endast en oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

29. Kunskap om kognitiv, fysisk och social utveckling hos barn och unga * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

30. Beredskap att bemöta vårdnadshavare och anhöriga till barn och unga * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

31. Beredskap att möta människor/körsångare med olika kulturella bakgrunder * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

32. Att anordna/projektleda, konserter och framträdanden * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

33. Att arbeta med sceniska framträdanden och koreografi * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

34. Att samverka tvärkonstnärligt och med andra aktörer * *Markera endast en oval.*

1 2 3 4 5 6

Inte alls Mycket väl

35. Ev. kommentar om hur din utbildning förberedde dig för körledning.

36. Med den erfarenhet du har skaffat dig genom åren som körledare: vad menar du att en körledningsutbildning av idag ska innehålla?

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37. Hur fick du tillgång till denna enkät? Genom vilken organisation?
Eller ange på vilket annat sätt! *

38. Om det skulle bli aktuellt, är du intresserad av att delta i en
uppföljande intervju? * *Markera alla som gäller.*

- Nej, jag vill att mina svar ska förbli anonyma
- Ja, jag kan tänka mig att ställa upp för en intervju. Jag skriver min
mejladress nedan under "Övrigt"

Övrigt:
