

MUSIC TEACHERS: WHO ARE THEY ANYWAY?

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Abstract

Being a music teacher requires a range of knowledge, skills and attributes of a kind that no other profession demands. Specifically, music teachers question whether they are primarily musicians or teachers, or whether they take on another coalesced persona. This persona is, in turn, related to the acquisition of musical and pedagogical skills, and to the timeframe for the development of these skills. In this paper, teachers discuss their backgrounds in music and education, their perceptions of themselves as musicians and teachers and their roles in the workplace. As they comment on who they are, they raise questions as to what needs to be “taught” in music teacher preparation courses, and where, when and how the required knowledge, skills and attributes are acquired.

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Good Teacher, regardless of subject area?

Music teachers are required to perform a range of tasks unlike those of other teachers. The training of music teachers needs to account for their specific role and allow for the dichotomy that can exist between those who perceive themselves as musicians who teach and those who are good teachers, whose subject area is music.

Good teachers, according to Palmer (1998), are able to “weave a complex web of connections about themselves” (p. 11). Beijaard (1995) and Korthagen (2004, p. 82) refer to the notion of identity as meanings that are attached to a person by themselves or others, while Bullough (1997) claims that an exploration of self is essential in the early stages of teacher education to ensure beginning teachers enter the profession with some concept of who they are and what they offer to education. Welmond (2002) suggests that teacher identity is dynamically contested, shaped by and constructed within potentially contradictory interests and ideologies, competing conceptions of rights and responsibilities of teachers, and differing ways of understanding success or effectiveness. Flores and Day (2006) develop this proposal, contending that learning to become a teacher has

multi-dimensional, idiosyncratic and context specific nature which entails an interplay between different, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives, beliefs and practices... for some new teachers feelings of isolation, mismatch between idealistic expectations and classroom reality and lack of support and guidance have been identified as key features. (p. 219)

Identity, Flores and Day (2006) conclude, is influenced by personal, social and cognitive responses. They present a model of teacher identity that encapsulates elements of biography, pre-service programs and school culture, suggesting that pre-service programs might be strengthened by the provision of opportunities to experience and reflect on personal biography and school context.

Identity is therefore shaped by experience, training and context. A significant aspect of context relates to the tasks teachers perform. According to O'Connor (2005, July), teachers' work is complex, multidimensional and subject to change in an era of globalization and shifting pedagogical paradigms. Becoming a teacher involves taking on a variety of personally and professionally challenging roles. The emotionally demanding nature of teaching also requires more than merely technical skills. Beginning teachers, according to Pietsch and Williamson (2005), need to have "the opportunity to articulate beliefs, ideals and values and to realize these in professionally and personally meaningful teaching assignments" (p. 370). They suggest that a lack of opportunity for this realization to take place can result in the professional identity of the beginning teacher being curtailed. Ofman (2000) refers to "core qualities" and claims that they are potentially always present. Korthagen (2004) asks, "what are the essential qualities of good teachers and how can we help people become good teachers?" (p. 78) and describes the process of locating core qualities that can assist teachers in enhancing the core qualities of their students.

Music teacher identity –what's the difference?

Music teachers' identity is, in many respects, peculiar to them. In general education, Goodsen and Cole (1994) and Volkmann and Anderson (1998) claim identity is formed through the role teachers perform. The nature of the music teachers'

role, encompassing teaching and performative tasks, along with the embedding of co-curricular involvement within required duties, are the most significant contributors to this difference. Woodford (2002) describes the music teacher's role as incorporating, but not being limited to, "performer, composer, conductor, critic, musicologist, mentor, facilitator, social activist, politician, music listener, music theorist, public intellectual, diplomat, travel agent, administrator, confidante, instructor, public speaker, moral agent, visionary and democratic leader" (p. 690). Jorgensen (2003, p. 130) confirms that music teachers are typically preoccupied with a wide variety of tasks, including developing imagination, interpretive creativity, the ability to listen, skills in improvising, and performing and critical judgment.

The timeframe for the development of these skills is crucial and raises the question as to where, when and how the knowledge skills and attributes are "taught". Professional identities of music teachers, according to Hargreaves, Welch, Purves, and Marshall (2003), are consolidated within the pre-service music course and change very little once they reach their first teaching post. Hargreaves and Marshall (2003) also noted that as pre-service teachers become early-career teachers, one of the small changes to take place was the perceived skills required for successful music teaching, with in-service teachers increasingly emphasizing communication and interpersonal skills rather than musical performance skills.

The balance between teaching and performance is one of the major concerns for the music teacher: that is, the nexus between musician and teacher and how this contributes to the formation of their identity. The work of Mark (1998) alludes to the use of an interdisciplinary approach to teacher training that simultaneously embeds musical and pedagogical skills. In spite of this, music teachers' identity is typically framed as musician or teacher. Evidence for this can be found in the work of Roberts

(1991) who suggests that music education majors conceptualize themselves as musicians rather than teachers. Woodford (2002) concurs that the socialization these students creates a self perception of musician rather than teacher. This, in turn, results in conflict in their teacher role identities: Teachers find it difficult to reconcile their musician persona and their teacher persona. While this is true in other subject areas (e.g. mathematician/math teacher, sportsperson/physical recreation teacher), teachers of music have the additional challenge of incorporating performance and composition skills into their everyday roles. Pascoe et al. (2005) summarize the distinctive nature of the music teacher in Australia in these terms:

Music teachers focus on both process and performance outcomes... music teachers sing, talk and play instruments through the length of their teaching day... this involves considerable out of class and out of school hours work in ensembles, rehearsals and performance.... (p. 135)

Bouij (1998) describes this aspect of development of music teacher identity by taking into account aspects of the teacher/musicians' professional role as teacher or performer and the relative musical levels of musical comprehensiveness required in each role.

The role of attributes in the construction of music teacher identity

Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop (2004) claim specific characteristics contributing to the formation of teachers' professional identity cannot be easily identified. A case could be put to suggest that music teacher attributes are significantly different from those required for other types of teaching. This assumption is related to the notion that music teachers have different roles, relationships and environments through which

they interact with students: co-curricular involvement, an emphasis on performance and composition along with the nature of music instruction through ensemble and one-to-one teaching makes for a distinctive set of attributes peculiar to the music teacher. This assumption is related to the notion that music teachers have different roles, relationships and environments through which they work with students, due to their co-curricular involvement, their interactions with students in ensemble and one-to-one teaching settings and the mentorship that they often provide students with in regards to performance and composition. These instructional situations that are outside the normal classroom context makes for a distinctive set of attributes peculiar to the music teacher.

Recent literature investigating the relationship of music teachers to their students has focussed on a wide variety of interrelated issues, from specific music skills through to broader personality traits. Young and Shaw (1999, p. 673) found that content knowledge rated highly in teacher success regardless of the teacher's overall effectiveness rating. Earlier studies (Berliner, 1986; Collier, 1987) also suggested that knowing one's subject matter is an attribute of effective teaching. The need to continually develop knowledge and skills was noted by Bidner (2001), who claims "music teacher educators have to keep abreast of the standards for effective teaching so that students are appropriately prepared" (p. 4). Teachout (1997) and Hamann, Baker, McAllister and Bauer (2000, p. 102) confirmed the desire for teachers to possess both teaching and personal skills.

In a study with 45 German music educators, Mark (1998, p. 9) commented that pedagogical, artistic, instrumental and vocal abilities, experience with music technology and competence as composer and arranger were considered highly in the selection of music teachers at entry to university. In a similar Viennese study, Mark

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reported that after pedagogical competencies, “the ability to animate” (i.e., create a stimulating atmosphere in which learning can take place) was ranked by music educators as a significant attribute. The findings of Warren and Rohwer (2004) confirm this, with teaching skills ranked as the most desirable attributes, followed by personality characteristics and musical skills. Ballantyne (2006) also noted that early-career music teachers’ passion for music teaching seems to be related to their love of the subject area.

Music teachers therefore fluctuate between the subject areas they love and the responsibilities of imparting this passion, through knowledge, skills and attributes, to others. As their roles are somewhat different from other teachers, the training of music teachers must reflect this difference and account for acquisition of content-related, practically based components, alongside pedagogical skills, curriculum knowledge and broad-based attributes. As it is not possible to incorporate all this in a pre-service program, the selection of students into teacher education programs needs to account for an intake of students with many skills already developed, while training deals with the enhancement of these aspects and the encouragement of ongoing learning.

Method

The research was undertaken with experienced classroom music teachers in urban Australia. Most teachers had been working in schools for at least 15 years, having completed four-year degree programs prior to entering the profession. Their teacher preparation programs typically comprised two years of concentrated studies in music, followed by two years of curriculum and pedagogy studies. The teachers were recruited through professional contacts and provided a cross-section of pedagogues

working in primary, secondary, private, public, classroom and instrumental fields. In this sense, elements of purposive sampling were also employed as the experienced teachers were selected on the basis of expertise in the field of study. The teachers worked in the middle and senior schools with students aged 12 – 16.

Experienced teachers were asked to identify some of the knowledge, skills and attributes that contributed to the construction of their identity. Data were gathered through questionnaires (Phase 1) and interviews (Phase 2). These methods were similar in that they both focussed on eliciting perceptions regarding important categories of knowledge skills required for the construction of music teacher identity.

In phase one of the data gathering process, a questionnaire was distributed to the participants to interrogate their perceptions regarding the knowledge, skills and attributes they require to function effectively in the classroom and the effectiveness of their pre-service teacher education, in-service training and experiences in developing these. The findings reported here focus specifically on participants' responses to the question: Do you perceive yourself as a musician, teacher, music teacher or something else? Responses from other questions related to course content in teacher education programs have also been incorporated where appropriate. The questionnaire was administered via e-mail. The asynchronous nature of e-mail communication allows the information to be readily obtained, with participants responses given at a convenient time, regardless of location. E-mail format allows the researcher to interact with the participant, ensuring clarification on issues arising from questions posed. Additional features of these type of interaction (as found by Im & Chee, 2003) include financial cost-saving, "as they do not require long-distance travel and the expenses of paper, pencils, photo-copying, and mailing fees" (p. 7). Beck (2005, p.

412) noted that costs could be further minimized, as this form of data collection does not require transcription.

For phase 2 of the research, interviews were undertaken at the participants' schools. Frey and Mertens-Oshi (1995) define an interview as "a purposeful conversation in which one person asks prepared questions (interviewer) and another answers them (respondent)" (p. 1). Six teachers were selected from Phase 1, based on the depth of their responses to the questionnaire and convenience for interviewing face-to-face. Participants represented a range of approaches to teaching and a variety of educational contexts. The purpose of the interviews was to pursue the contents of the questionnaire in greater detail. A semi-structured, informal interview of 40 to 50 minutes was conducted and videotaped. This style of interview was considered appropriate because, as Nichols (1991) suggests, in "an informal interview, not structured by a standard list of questions, the interviewer can choose to deal with the topics of interest in any order, and to phrase their questions as they think best" (p. 131). While structured interviews are easily more readily quantifiable and allow for more direct comparisons, semi-structured interviews can reveal a "richness of data" (Oatley, 1998, p. 1) and cause the data to be viewed through a completely different lens. In addition to probing the question of identity as musician or teacher, the interviewees were asked to comment on aspects of early influences as musician-teachers, their university training and on-the-job training.

The data from both phases of the study were subjected to content analysis (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001) to identify themes, concepts and meanings (Burns, 2000). It was the purpose of this study to find similarities and differences between the themes emerging in pre-service and early-career music teachers' perceptions of the desirable attributes of effective music teachers.

Findings

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked: Do you perceive yourself as a musician, teacher, music teacher or something else? The responses to this question were quite evenly spread: Three teachers considered their main identity to be as musician, while four regarded themselves as teachers first and foremost, with their subject being music. Only two responses indicated they were music teachers and three teachers considered themselves as musician and teacher equally. For most, the opportunity to devote their lives to music led them to the art-form first and subsequently to teaching.

Steven: Basically for as long as I can remember I had a passion for music and it was one of the only things in which I had much success as a student. To this day I still have this passion as well as one for teaching.

One teacher's response represented the considerable struggle found in identifying oneself in this way:

Jan: I continue to struggle with this question for two reasons. The first is because I don't believe you can have a successful career in both simultaneously. I have come to accept that I will forever feel a conflict between my "musician" identity and my "teacher" identity. Sometimes this conflict is so great that I don't perceive myself to be a musician at all anymore which brings me great sadness... On a philosophical level I like to think of myself as someone who inspires and helps others to have a richer life. My chosen tool or medium happens to be music.

Others were quite clear as to their identity:

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Mary: I am a teacher first and my subject area is music. I am a musician last of all.

In responses to other questions, Mary also indicated what a fine musician she was, leading her wind ensemble to successes at competitions and producing high quality students for university entry. This was pursued further in the interviews. Other teachers, rather than giving a definitive response, ranked these roles, as Mary did above, and added some to the list:

Julie: I consider myself to be a musician first, a music teacher second, and a teacher third. The reasons for this are: I was always a musician, from a very early age. I was never always a teacher, although my mother always thought I would be a good teacher. Once my skill in music making improved, I naturally gravitated towards teaching as a means of employment.... Therefore I cannot easily separate the role of musician from the role of music teacher/educator. I'm also a parent.

The inclusion of parent raises the issue of life experiences and how these affect the teacher. This was also raised in the interviews. Julie's response also resonates with the conundrum in tertiary music teacher preparation of the performer who "ends up" teaching, introducing the notion of the "accidental" music teacher. Another respondent echoed these words:

Annette: [I see myself as a] musician – my love of music decided my career of 35 years. I trained to advance my music skill and knowledge.... I became a teacher by default.

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The default music teacher is not necessarily a “bad” music teacher, but one who comes to the vocation with a different mindset than those, like Julie and Mary, who seem to have a predestined approach. This mindset presents challenges for the teacher educator in relation to teacher efficacy. One of the two respondents to construe themselves as “music teacher” gave this more succinct response:

Peter: My immediate response is I perceive myself as a Music Teacher.

However in order to carry out this role I need to have both the skills of a teacher and of a musician. I never forget my primary purpose to teach music but often forget my own ability as a musician.

A final comment in the area is from a teacher who has taken a broader perspective since undertaking part-time employment as a teacher educator:

Eliza: I perceive myself to be a teacher, but having now been involved in teacher training, I think I identify my role as one of an educator. In performance, either as an instrumentalist or conductor, I am a musician. Musicianship and instrumental technique constitute my core content knowledge in music teaching at a school level. The role of an educator, however, needs to extend beyond this core knowledge. There are many musical people who are poor teachers. When teaching, I feel that I need to focus on being a teacher. The process is not about me, it becomes about the students’ needs.

Teachers also offered some suggestions on how this conundrum can be dealt with in the teacher education process. Most teachers recognized that pre-service courses could not contain all the necessary components. Suggestions were offered as to the balance of musical and pedagogical skills, as evidenced in this comment from Trevor:

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Trevor: To become a good music teacher, the course should involve a great deal of emphasis on the development of the musician. This would include, conducting skills, instrumental skills (particularly keyboard).

In the discussion over music and pedagogical skills, Shane suggested that some of the personal skills had been overlooked, commenting that much of the music teacher role involved dealing with people and administration:

Shane: Teacher education courses need to provide an initial foundation for pre-service teachers to have the practical skills needed to teach. Teacher education also needs to focus on the development of what has been called “soft skills” such as interpersonal skills and assertive communication and other administrative tasks.

Shane’s remarks offer some breadth to the discussion, particularly in relation to the content of courses and the way in which such skills might be taught. The remarks also contribute to the dialogue as to elements that could be placed beyond the initial training phase in professional learning contexts, as Rebecca remarked:

Rebecca: Teacher education will hopefully provide some foundation and initial skills for teachers. Continuous learning is required to allow teachers to develop their skill bases further, making choices that are applicable to their individual experiences and talents as well as to the context in which they are practising. It is unlikely that initial teacher education can be comprehensive in terms of the skill needs of all students for all teaching contexts.

In the interview situation, some teachers commented on the constant interaction of musician/teacher roles, with the teacher role growing out of the musician role. Jan

comments on the notion of passion, highlighted by so many responses in the first phase of the study, while Julie also returns to the intrinsic nature of teaching:

Jan: During college I developed a passion for music education and then from the classroom went into it and thought there is where I need to be.

In Phase 1, Julie commented that she could not easily separate the role of musician from the role of music teacher/educator. When this was probed in the interview, she extrapolated:

Julie: Well now I'm a musician actually and the teaching is sort of intrinsically so bound with that because everything I've learnt has been through music and everything I then do is based on that teaching.

Julie's experience was a common theme: that is, that the two roles were inextricably linked. Her reference to "everything I've learnt has been through music" was echoed by Mary, who embraced a more holistic approach, with music as a conduit to a broader end:

Mary: My speciality is music, but my prime purpose in being here is for the benefit of students and for their greater education, and that includes a whole heap more than music.

This response is consistent with Mary's insistence in Phase 1 that she is a teacher first and foremost, despite her considerable musical skills. The perception of music teachers by other faculty was a highlight of Julie's responses. The identity of the music teacher as being different from other teachers can be both a blessing and a curse: creative skills and attributes are perceived by some as being diametrically opposed to organizational skills, with significant impact in career progression prospects. Julie's remarks allude to this:

Julie: Teachers consider us (music teachers) different from other teachers ... I think the external image of us is that we are all slightly crazy and that we couldn't possibly know how to run the school, or the department.

Music teachers who wish to be promoted may therefore stifle some of the "musician" characteristics in order to progress to head of department or principal.

In other questions related to teacher identity, experienced teachers commented further on course content to create music teachers. Danielle described the essentials of a pre-service program, basing her response initially on music skills, and then branching out into a pedagogical focus:

Danielle: ... the musical skills foundation and how to teach aural work, how to teach history how to teach composition, then they need to be given perhaps a little bit of instruction on the delivery of a curriculum.

Remarks from other interviewees focused on broad-based knowledge and flexibility:

Peter: Obviously in terms of pre-service teacher training as a music teacher you want to have a good basis in lots of different musical genres so you've got some foundation knowledge, but certainly you want to have an approach that gives you flexibility in terms of your delivery.

Peter's reference to a "good basis in different musical genres" begs the question as to how this is achieved: Does it occur through study about music or through participation in music in the pre-service phase? The answer to this question lies in the content and delivery of the pre-service course and the location of music education in the pre-service phase.

Discussion

The responses from both the questionnaires and the interviews reflect the idiosyncratic nature of the music teacher. The music teacher's role, involving both teaching and performance tasks in almost equal measure, requires specific types of training through pre-service programs and on-going learning.

The teachers in the study confirmed that a wide variety of pedagogical and musical skills are required for beginning music teachers and that some of these take place through formal learning processes including instruction, practice, example and reflection (Howard, 1992). Throughout this paper, "taught" has been used in quotation marks. This is because the word implies an emphasis on formal learning and transmission and many of the qualities discussed cannot necessarily be imparted in this way. Learning also takes place through less formal activities such as osmosis, participation, observation and sensibility (Jorgenson, 2003), so the challenge will be to account for both the formal and informal. Examples of how this could occur might include observation in school settings and changes to courses that emphasize participation over more theoretical knowledge.

Within the music teacher preparation program, the placement and style of practicum experience was one of the themes to emerge from the research. Experienced teachers advocated mentor-based programs from the earliest stages of the degree, to be maintained throughout the degree and into the first years of teaching. There was also support for an apprenticeship-type model, whereby teachers could learn through the informal modes of observation and osmosis. This has support in the literature that reports that students who work alongside teachers display improved attitudes towards teaching as a career (Harrison, 2006; Mills, 2005).

The location of music education within the university model was an underlying theme in the interviewees' responses. Those who emphasized a thorough understanding and appreciation of musical knowledge and skills advocated a conservatorium-based model in which high quality performance skills were valued. Others emphasized a need for pedagogical skills and an understanding of curriculum and child development, and therefore preferred a model primarily based in an education school or faculty. The ideal is a paradigm in which, as the Mark (1998) advocates, there is a breaking down of "barriers between the disciplines involved" (p. 19). The author is employed in an interdisciplinary environment, with duties across a performance-focused conservatorium and a teacher-preparation-focused education faculty. As such, the music-teacher conflict is an everyday experience, both autobiographically and in the lives of students.

The musician-teacher has been an ongoing construct in the western musical tradition. The teachers in this study acknowledged that they vacillated between the two identities in the macro sense throughout their careers, and in the micro sense in their classrooms each day. There are challenges in providing suitable pre-service training for these teachers and a need to acknowledge the role of lifelong learning in the process of becoming a music educator.

Further research

It is not possible or desirable to definitively conclude with neat answers to the questions of where, when and how the required knowledge, skills and attributes for music teachers are acquired. As the research in the field is ongoing, the suggestions here are preliminary. The author is developing a model, based on Howard (1992) and

Jorgensen (2003) that presents a way of acquiring knowledge, skills and attributes through instruction, practice, example and reflection, osmosis, participation, observation and sensibility. Furthermore, as acknowledged in this paper, the sequencing of learning experiences is also being explored in relation to the chronological development of music teacher identity in the local context with some synergies that could have application across contexts. The voices of experienced music teachers have much to offer the field of music teacher education.

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