Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

**A Comment to Rhoda Bernard:
Reframing or Oversimplification?**

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Introduction

In an earlier issue of *ACT* (Number 2, 2005), Dr. Rhoda Bernard has presented a call for re-framing music teacher education (Bernard 2005). Based on my experience as a leader of a Swedish longitudinal project about music teacher socialization since the late 1980s I will discuss some problems with her call.

 I have been working as a music teacher educator since 1980 and I soon realized that there were things happening with students that were difficult for me to grasp. My colleague at Malmö Academy of Music, Stephan Bladh, had similar concerns. That became a starting point for a joint research project about Swedish music teachers in training and in their professional lives. A major discovery on a personal level was how embedded I was in the daily life of music teacher education. As I developed a deeper understanding during the research process, I realized the importance of lifting my eyes above my daily meetings with teacher students in order to distinguish the social structures that we all—teachers and students—constitute. In other words, the need to realize the importance of the extensive, continuous negotiating processes of the education content—musical, pedagogical, and didactical—that affects all teachers and students. The inhabitants of the music school are so used to these negotiating processes that they take the outcome for granted; in other words, they are abducted by the discourse.

 The data in our longitudinal project derives from questionnaires and interviews gathered over a period of 16 years. We continue to follow a class of music teacher students from their first entry to music education. All six national university music schools in Sweden have participated. When our research subjects were newly admitted to the music teacher program in the summer of 1988, they completed their first questionnaire; since then they have answered

questionnaires in 1992—after finishing their music teacher education—and then again in 1995, 1998, and 2003. The group consisted originally of 232 freshmen, and 169 of them answered the questionnaire (response rate 73%). In 1992, 136 individuals responded; in 1995, 133; in 1998, 124; and in 2003, 113. In the middle of the 90s, 37 subjects amongst them were interviewed and in the new century we have started re-interviewing again.

Discourse and identity

In this article I want to elucidate Bernard's use of the concepts "musician-teacher identity", "discourse", and her version of the central theoretical concept of "identity". I will argue that her use of these concepts only obscures the discussion. Therefore, we need a clearer understanding of these concepts. As a concept, "musician-teacher identity" is far too broad and imprecise. What is the difference between a "musician-teacher identity" and a "music teacher identity"? After all, music teachers can and usually do perform music. Her use of the term "discourse" is also misleading and does not point towards or account for the daily informal processes around the music teacher's identity construction that actually occur, as revealed by our empirical research.

Bernard states that her article "is an effort to broaden the academic conversation about music educators and identity" (Bernard, 2005, p. 7). She also says she created the term "musician-teacher identity" to reflect her ideas about what a music teacher is and does (p. 10). Other researchers are said by Bernard to describe music teacher education as a socialization process *away* from the role identity of 'musician' to the role identity of 'teacher', and, at the same time, these researchers are portrayed by her as lamenting that the music teacher training programs are failing to socialize the students as future music teachers (p. 8).

Bernard also claims that there exists a discourse in the field of music education[1] that music-making experiences are in conflict with effective music teaching. Her discourse also proclaims that the scholars responsible for literature about music teacher education suggest that such music-making experiences should be abandoned by pre-service music teachers so that they can become socialized as effective teachers (p. 13). I would argue that this is not a discourse— this is Bernard's strange reading of the earlier existing research literature.

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What is discourse? Discourse refers to "semiotic elements of social practice" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 38). It is a matter of recognition, a way to talk about familiar conditions in a way that is taken for granted in the actual context (Gee, 1999, p. 27). A discourse also involves conventions of right and wrong behavior (Harré & Gillet, 1994, p. 36). When the individual has realized how the present discourse is constituted, he or she has to adapt to it in order to feel comfortable. It is important to note that a discourse is an element in a social practice. It is impossible to discuss the discourse without discussing the practice as a whole and to state what practice it is. Said in another way, a discourse is socially situated.

The main subject of Bernard's article is identity. She writes that she understands "identity" as "processual" (p. 5). In spite of that, she deals with the musician-teacher identity as if it was more or less static. To discuss identity in this way, without problematizing the changing contexts that surround identity development, leads nowhere (cf. Bladh, 2004, p. 17 f.). Individual identities are always involved in constant processes of interaction with the surrounding environment. A major problem with Bernard's argument is that she has solely interviewed music teachers *after* their education, and from these findings she draws conclusions for all of music teacher education. This is misleading; it fails to take into account the very different contexts of teacher education and professional life. By her choice of interviewees, her study also lacks music teachers who no longer work as music teachers; music teachers who have quit the profession have relevant things to say about the question of identity, as well.

Education code and school code

Two central phenomena that have to be considered in understanding the identity construction amongst teacher students and teachers are 'education code' and 'school code'. 'Education code' (Arfwedson, 1984, p. 12) is connected to students. 'School code' is connected to teachers (Arfwedson, 1983, p. 28 ff.). Both codes are collective positions, "principles for interpretation and acting" that exist in every education institution. In the first place, the *education code* deals with how to handle everyday problems and how to set priorities between the supply of knowledge and skills; but as opposed to the code of the teachers, it does not include principal interpretations about school and education. *School code* refers to the principles

for interpretation and acting that have developed amongst the teachers at a particular school. The education code has, of course, a relationship to the school code.

An important forum of influence between these two principles for interpretation and acting are the individual lessons at university music schools. These codes are renegotiated daily; new individuals with new experiences are included in this negotiating when they enter these institutions, and teachers and students also come across new impressions from the world outside of school. In these negotiations, the discourse is molded in a way that separates the university school of music from the professional working life of music teachers because it stresses the importance of musical performance abilities over teaching abilities. This is the context where conceivable identities are chiseled.

When the freshmen enter the university music school, they begin their formal education, but they also acquire an informal education in practice rooms and corridors where they meet the negotiating system, the code systems—foremost the education code—and the discourses connected to these code systems. The older students and the students with high status are the most important transmitters in this process. Teachers with high status, namely the performance teachers, are also very important in the process. They are also often the foremost and outspoken predecessors and purveyors of the school code.

The common discourse amongst most music teacher educators and music students holds that the more or better you play, the better music teacher you become. The discourse also does not separate teacher knowledge from musical knowledge in a way similar to what Bernard describes as her desired re-framing. That is how the phenomenon "music teacher" is understood in the university 'school code'. Some teachers of teaching methodology can present an alternative picture and say that it is important that the students develop practical skills in order to reach the future pupils; it is not enough to be a good instrumentalist. I get the impression that Bernard confuses research and discourse.

The 'education code' says that no natural antagonism exists between the educational and the musical aspects of the teacher education. A typical reaction in our data comes in an interview with a violin teacher. We were talking about music making, and I tried to bring in teaching aspects. When asked about her identity during her teacher education, she replied:

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> But I think that it is a state of opposition they create, by asserting that there is a difference between being a music teacher and a performer, from the point of view of identity.

This is a typical discursive way of reasoning. In this way she expresses a critique against teachers who emphasized educational aspects of her teacher preparation "too much". Teaching music and performing music are so close to each other that there is little value in even separating them even for analytical reasons, she thinks.

Such an utterance must be interpreted as part of the accumulated empirical data. As a researcher I must ask about and listen for the more tacit and hidden values that hide behind what my interviewees say. We can compare her utterance with the following from a student of eurhythmy. This interview was made a couple of months into her studies—November of her first year. She has just discovered that the 'education code' supports performing, but neglects a pedagogical interest. She has now learned to be cautious about revealing that she has a great interest in teaching music to the youngest children. If you are too interested in small children, there is something wrong, says the education code, a conclusion which can mean that you lack interest in the performance dimension of musical artistry.

> And you have to look out for how you express yourself, you can't just blurt out and try to get others interested when you are saying: "I really want to be a teacher!" Because people react as, "Why do you want that? Why do you want to be a teacher?" And then you can't say that you want to be a teacher in pre-school; then you are totally stupid, so I don't tell anyone.

This is an unusually frank description of the mechanisms that surround the education code. It is worth noting that this is a 'low status' student because her main subject is eurhythmy, not performance. This explains why she is so sensitive about the border limits of the discourse. This student is also very motivated to work with smaller children in order to build a foundation for future musicianship. In our project we have many remarks pointing in this same direction, but no one else so outspoken. She has a pupil-centered teacher identity.

During interpreting, it is vital to compare utterances that point in different directions in order to be able to understand the structures behind the individual opinions. What is absolutely

fundamental is to distinguish between different levels of interpretation. All that is said does not have the same validity. A Norwegian expert on interview methods points out that, in principle, such research has to deal with three contexts of interpretation: individual self-understanding, critical common-sense understanding, and theoretical understanding (Kvale, 1996, p. 214 ff.). When I read Bernard's article I have a suspicion that she mixes up these contexts. Her analysis seems to be too superficial; I am not even sure if she is aware when she leaves self-understanding, and the critical common-sense understanding, to reach the theoretical understanding.

In my experience, listening is the key to good interviews. If you are interviewing music teacher students, it is very easy to get replies about the importance of musicianship, and more or less empty assurances about interest in teaching. To get to hear genuine and deeper anchored opinions about teaching, the researcher has to be a good listener and must also communicate a willingness to listen and understand low status opinions with seriousness.

The researcher must be open and prepared for different ways of regarding important issues. In this way you can also discover inside the discourse that all students do not agree about what is central in their education. Another statement in the discourse pointing toward what is not acceptable in the explicit formulated values comes from a clarinet teacher:

> I think absolutely, that it is poor […] in a way during the education [that] you should [have to] be forced to play in concerts, even if you don't want it; that I think absolutely.

He is very critical of the students who do not perform much during their teacher education. On the other hand, a smaller group of teacher students is critical of those who lack interest in pedagogical issues. This quotation comes from a classroom teacher with violin as her principal instrument:

> Their practice pupils were the worst that they had during these years of education. I am mostly talking about one of them. He completely ignored them. He just taught them because he had to.

This kind of opinion is uncommon—a low status view representing more hidden values. It is a

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view that seldom is proclaimed as loudly because it does not fit in the discourse of the 'education code'. The education code values good performance. Students who perform well are rewarded with high status by the 'education code', and these students are thus also the basis for determining what characterizes a good performance. On the other side, the 'education code' has very little to say about good teaching by the students. The following quotation comes from a classroom music teacher, with flute as her principal instrument, who had experience as a music teacher before her teacher education studies and who therefore knew what she wanted from it:

> I think, actually it is a great conflict, because it is so fun, when you have started your education and you get lessons on your own instrument, you feel: "how much fun!" To do so much as possible of that… I felt that, had I not been working as a music teacher before, I had might have tried to choose to change over to a pure instrumental teacher program, to be able to play the instrument more; but I knew the demands from of working life as a music teacher.

When put together, we can see from our empirical data that this individual has understood the relationship between education and working life in a realistic way. She knows what she needs from the music teacher education program to be the kind of music teacher she wants. In 2003, she also says that she is well-prepared for her music teacher profession. If asked about her identity she might answer teacher-intermediator. This is an example of how far astray the musician-teacher identity would lead us.


Changing attitudes and identities

These statements also tell us about how the students have to navigate identities during their education. What is the individual's picture of a teacher's and a performer's working life? How does he or she value his or her own possibilities in working life? And what aspirations does the individual have from education and, later, in working life? Different students have different answers to these questions. These answers are too often filtered through the student discourse, with result that—given the 'school code' around them—many students undervalue the meaning of preparation for the educational dimension in their education.

We also know that there are changes in the students' attitudes toward their future

professional lives during their education. In all the questionnaires, there has been a question concerning the student's main reason for choosing to be a music teacher. The question was formulated slightly differently in the first questionnaire from the summer of 1988, after they had been admitted as music teacher students. This figure depicts the answers from 1988 and 1992, when the students just were leaving their teacher education for working life.
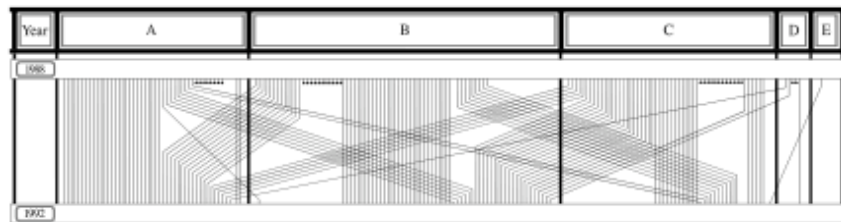
[Editor's note: details can be viewed by increasing magnification.]

Figure 1. The survey question which forms the basis for determining patterns of preference over a period of ten years is formulated like this:

There can be many different reasons for choosing a particular education. Try to find a reason below that fits you reasonably well.

> A) *I'm convinced that it is a music teacher I want to be.*
> B) *I only want to work part-time as a music teacher. I want to devote the rest of my time to my own music-making or other activities.*
> C) *I want the music teacher training for a possible source of income, but primarily, I want to devote myself to my own music-making or other activities.*
> D) *I want the music teacher training because I'm very interested in music. But I probably won't work as a music teacher, as I don't believe I would make a suitable teacher.*

> E) *I'm applying for the music teacher training program because friends of mine who took it told me the program's really good and enjoyable.*

This fifth alternative was only used in the first questionnaire. The short broken-off lines ending in black dots are dropouts from the program.

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In Figure 1 we can see that many students have moved to the left, to the more teacher oriented side, so to speak. What does that mean? The answer can be summarized like this: individuals who believe that they have other ways of earning their living than as a music teacher can afford to have a low preference for the teacher occupation. Of course there are some exceptions. Some of the changes pictured in the figure have to do with actual re-evaluations of interest as some students have discovered that it is more fun to play or to teach than they previous thought. Bernard's concept musician-teacher identity does not take into account the types of changes caused by adjusting to the demands of the surrounding world. Most of what appears to be changes in the figure are in fact students who think that their musical abilities are not high enough for a future life in the future as performers; thus, they now have to become content with being "only" teachers—a sad formulation heard very often in the interviews. This means that the performer identity has a too dominating place in the students' minds, as a result of participating in the daily university music school discourse.

A typical way example of this reasoning, represents is this statement from a voice teacher:

> As a singer, I didn't get so many performing jobs, because I did not know so many people outside the music school […] Everything was connected to the music school and the other singers that who studied there, knew people outside that they were associated with, and they got many jobs but I didn't get so many jobs, and then I thought: "Oh I am bad, I don't get any jobs!"

That was the reason she answered on the questionnaire, at the time in connection with her final examination in 1992, that she wanted to be a teacher. Her view had nothing at all to do with the

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formal education in the university music school. The answer reflects how she thought her student colleagues looked at her through the education code. When she began working in professional life she eventually got many opportunities to sing in public, she also got engagements on television. Then her self-confidence as a singer grew considerably.

What happens the first years after their introduction to working life seems to be that the beginning music teachers have to make a working compromise with their own values connected to their professional role identities (Bouij, 2006). They have to adapt to the 'school code' of the individual school. Sometimes this struggle for musical values and what is meaningful to teach is difficult. In working life, the powerful struggle between a musical and a pedagogical identity is also weakened in relation to other identity concerns. They become parents, they have a house to pay for, and they feel that they must get steady work. Can they arrange opportunities to continue to play music that gives them enough satisfaction? Can they teach music in a way that feels gratifying enough? Is there enough time for a family situation, teaching, *and* professional or even amateur music playing?

The label musician-teacher is also too broad to point to the different levels of preparation a music educator needs. From a Swedish research project about choir singing, I can demonstrate this with interviews with two students from a Swedish music college preparatory education program. They talk about their abilities in singing, their main subject. The first student is a good sight reader and during the rehearsals can look at the score and see how the arrangement is built up, and so on (Stenbäck, 2001, p. 69). However, the other says:

> I am a very bad music reader, so when I practice I used to sit at the piano. Then I play though the piece bit by bit and sing. Then I have no problems. (ibid., p. 73)

There are also considerably different pedagogical demands made on music teachers for small children compared to those working with older and more advanced pupils. We know from research about how to acquire musical skill and that the first music teacher should be a friendly, relaxed and encouraging person, while later students often benefit from a more musically demanding person (Davidson, Howe & Sloboda, 1997, p. 202).

Amongst my interviewees there is a cello teacher, whom I judge as a very good teacher

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(Bouij, 1998, p. 307-312; 354). I have interviewed her twice and she spoke with enthusiasm about her pupils. She was a good player and she also talked with pleasure and insight about her pupils. A couple of years later we find her working full time in information technology. After four years as a music teacher, she studied multi-media at the university. She writes about her situation:

> I felt as time passed, that being a music teacher was a lonely, monotonous, and low valued profession. This low value affects locals, treatment, and salary. I had high demands on myself as a music teacher (good pedagogue, good musician, inspiring and so on), then I read further in multi-media. It was the best thing I have done! Creative, working with other people, theoretical knowledge and a salary to live on! Now the working market is not so light, but I can wait for it…. Music is still there as a big interest.

Swedish sociologist Mats Trondman has carried though a research project about Swedish teachers. He interviewed pupils about what they expect from a good teacher. Trondman summarizes one main finding from the project regarding good teachers: "They have a very obvious desire to be there, a desire to be together with the pupils" (Brozin Bohman, 2001, p. 18). He says that it is most devastating for the pupils if the teachers signal that they actually do not want to be with them (Trondman, 1999, p. 419). This can seem self-evident, but if a music teacher, regardless of the pupils he or she works with, does not find enough pleasure in teaching them, he or she will be alienated from pupils, or 'burn out' and drop out. This also emphasizes the importance of giving the future music teachers a real opportunity to develop the social skills needed for working life. This is also a reason why it is misleading to ask for a re-framing of music teacher education where the concept musician-teacher identity is put in focus.

Competence, identity, and working life

The important thing is that the music teachers can build a teaching identity that is effective in working life, regardless of what kind of teacher they eventually become. That can differ greatly for the individuals during their music teacher studies. That is because their future occupations differ just as much. But from our research, it seems much more common that music teachers lack pedagogical insight more so than musical competence. As music teacher educators, we

must therefore give the students support for their pedagogical development just as the institution traditionally does for their musical development. This is not an argument for less performing in the university music school, but it is a pledge that we should be more aware that the students' musical aptitudes and achievements should be clearly connected to their future professional needs as educators. We should also give the music teacher students opportunity to reflect about identity issues from different points of view; intrinsic urges about confirmation, communication, the will to influence others and to be influenced by others, are all important aspects.

Actually, what the discussion is about is an old problem. From the pupil's and student's point of view, it could be put as: What is a good and committed teacher? The old flute master from the Eighteenth century, Johann Joachim Quantz, writes about this problem: "To be sure, there are some who play the instrument well, or at least passably; many, however, lack the ability to impart to others that which they know themselves. It is possible that somebody who plays quite well knows little of how to teach. Someone else may teach better than he plays" (Quantz, 1985/1752, p. 16).

I think this is a matter of identity. We can't force a certain identity onto our music teacher students. But we can support them in seeking knowledge: knowledge in music, knowledge about teaching, but also realistic knowledge about working life. Self-knowledge should also be paid attention to, as it applies to developing the necessary social skill.

Bernard maintains that she makes use of the term "musician-teacher identity" to "highlight two of the shifting positions and contexts in music educators' professional identities […] that exist in relation to one another in various ways" (Bernard, 2005, p. 10). Actually she only once mentions teaching in the article. That is when she discusses Lorraine's teaching. This makes me suspicious. Why are we not told anything about the other interviewees' teaching. Is that not important for them?

I suspect that is a consequence of Bernard's a priori conception of what she sees a music teacher *ought* to be, a concept which is too closely connected to "normal" discourse about music teachers in the university music school. I also think that she has fallen in the trap of not getting behind what her interviewees say; far too much is taken at face value.

This demonstrates how in comparison, our longitudinal design provides a much deeper

and richer understanding. It is dangerous to do a short interview visit in a teacher's working life without being careful about the limitations in interpreting the broader possibilities. Today we know that the conflict between a musician identity and a teacher identity during teacher training is soon reconstructed in working life. Our recall slowly changes about how we remember things in getting our present identity to be coherent with the past. We reinterpret our past (cf. Plummer, 1985, p. 102).

That means that if our research subjects work full-time as professional musicians—not so unusual amongst our Swedish subjects—then they remember their musical education as a good preparation for this. If they are working as music teachers, they very often ask on our questionnaires—eleven years after leaving their formal education—"why was not I prepared for this or that". One flute teacher writes after eleven years in working life that she has had problems getting along as a music teacher: "If you play a woodwind instrument you have to have basic teaching knowledge about the whole woodwind group […]. As a musician I have managed much better and felt much safer."

Conclusion

This means that the music education program seems to prepare rather well for the 'musician' profession, but not so well for the 'teacher' profession. But you also have to remember that musicians were the ones who were good performers during their educations, and those who were not so successful as performers do not become professional musicians. Students who were good performers *and* good teachers are freer to choose but, as seen from my examples above, it is in some cases not enough to be a good musician and a good teacher. It is fundamental to have the feeling of gratification from your profession. Many music teachers complain about giving out without getting enough back. They originally thought that teaching would be more rewarding in the long run.

In another article, Bernard describes the elementary general music teacher Peter Blumenthal. On the wall just above him in the classroom there is the text:

Teacher	Musician
Mr. Blumenthal	

(Bernard, 2004, p. 281.)

Rhetorically I can ask if he uses the same sign when he performs? It may seem a ridiculous question, but as qualitative researchers we must put such question to ourselves. In this case I must refer to the Strauss and Corbin rule "waving the red flag"—caution that when we meet something that seems too obvious, we must be on alert (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 91 ff.). It is obvious that Mr. Blumenthal is bothered that he is not seen as a musician when he teaches. In our research we have teachers who are indeed good performers, but when they are in teaching situations they are having a good time with their pupils, they feel that they are making music with the pupils, and that is enough for their professional reward and self-confidence. They have no desire to proclaim that they in fact are good performers to their pupils. They feel that being good music teachers in the interaction with pupils is rewarding enough, and is a good enough profession in itself.

Without an awareness of the code systems and how these systems interpret dominant and conflicting values, the music schools' understanding of their educating mission is not realistic. This knowledge is also vital when trying to develop the students' independence and responsibility concerning the prospects of working life (cf. Jørgensen, 2000, p. 75). All music education students do not need to be the best performers, only one can be the best; but, they all need to be good performers, good enough to meet the musical needs of future pupils. They also need to have teaching skills and a sense for pupils as human beings, so their musical and educational knowledge and skills can benefit pupils and students. In short: music teacher education must have the mission of helping students develop a professional identity that will succeed in their professional lives—regardless of how the individual identity is constituted—because ever-new identities will arise when they meet new teaching contexts.

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Notes

[1] By talking of "the field of music education", Bernard ignores the fact that the discourse in the university music school and later in working life is very different. The discourse amongst students in music school has much to say about performing values, while the discourse in the future working place often is more down to earth and connected to the teaching experiences that the teachers meet.

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