

Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

The refereed journal of the



Volume 6, No. 2
October 2007

Thomas A. Regelski, Editor
Wayne Bowman, Associate Editor

“All the Things We Are”: Balancing our Multiple Identities in Music Teaching

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ISSN 1545-4517

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“All the Things We Are”: Balancing our Multiple Identities in Music Teaching

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“For now we know in part...”¹

I read with great interest Rhoda Bernard’s (2005) article “Making Music, Making Selves.” Her concerns about the multiple identities that she holds, and our tendency to compartmentalize our various identities according to audience and role are issues for me as I design and teach within music teacher education programmes. Bernard mourns the fact that she is forced to present only a select part of herself when in academic audiences, belying the fact that she has robust and varied identities that undoubtedly feed who she is as a teacher. She struggles with the same question that we all do when presenting ourselves to others—indeed, colleagues, students, friends or family: How do we choose which identity will make us seem relevant, important, someone who ought to be listened to? This raises the question of what we as teacher educators value as “teacher identity?” When we engage in research about teacher identity, or pedagogies whose aim is to develop teacher identity, do we force our teacher candidates to fragment their realities? In this article I hope to join the conversation and propose several other themes for consideration.

“I”-identity

Who am I? Who do you think you are? Who do you think I am? These are questions that we all struggle with as we attempt to negotiate our place in life, in family, at work, with friends, with strangers. The study of identity has become an important—if somewhat contested—conversation in music education. Who we are, more correctly, who we “see” ourselves being, has tremendous impact on how we live our life, who we invite into our lives, how we treat people, how we expect to be treated. Psychotherapists have made fortunes helping us sort out the answer to the question of identity. Yet, identity is not purely an inwardly gazing phenomenon,

Dolloff, L. (2007) “‘All the Things We Are’ : Balancing our Multiple Identities in Music Teaching” *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 6/2: http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Dolloff6_2.pdf

or identity formation/transformation a path with an end in sight. The quest for our identity is like learning itself. We learn more about who we are, how we think, how we feel as we engage in our day to day lives; whether through crisis or through the quotidian events through which we pass most of our time. As we learn about who we are² and “how” we are, our identities are being constructed always in reference to where we are and those people we are with. Being a sentient being implies that there is an awareness of our surroundings.

One more small distinction of terms must be made, that of the nature of role versus identity. Bouij (2006) uses role theory to articulate a sense of expectation associated with a certain social position. I take the difference to be: “Role” is what a teacher *does* while “identity” is who a teacher *is*: how an individual integrates his or her evergrowing/everchanging skills, beliefs, emotional response to the teaching/learning act and to students, and subject-specific knowledge. In this identity debate, it seems that we are concerned with “am I this?” or “am I that”. Placing identities in an either-or dyad assumes the role that we fulfill as a music educator can be narrowly and indisputably defined. In fact we must bring all that we are to our role as music educators.

There seems to be general consensus that identity is a complex phenomenon, existing not as a unitary subjectivity, but in multiple layers, in webs, or as multi-faceted. Music educators are not alone in this complex layering of identities. Cooper and Olson (1996) point to the fact that professional identity is multifaceted. Historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural factors may all influence the teacher’s sense of self as a teacher. Other scholars point to a relationship between components of identities. Given my own musical life, I very much like Mischler’s analysis of the relationship of this plurality of “identities” in terms of a choir.³ To give expression to this, Mischler used the metaphor of “our selves as a chorus of voices, not just as the tenor or soprano soloist” (in Beijaard et al. 2003, p. 8). An individual’s professional identity consists of sub-identities that more or less harmonize. The notion of sub-identities relates to the individual’s different contexts and relationships. Some of these sub-identities may be broadly linked and can be seen as the core of teachers’ professional identity (Beijaard et al, 2004). For me, teacher education should focus on helping our students to harmonize the various voices that they bring to the teaching/learning situation. This sentiment is echoed by Beijaard et al. (2003):

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“it can be concluded that the better the relationships between the different identities, the better the chorus of voices sounds, (p. 8).”

The question remains, then, how do we as teacher educators help our students to “harmonize” their voices? Throughout the debate among construction, social construction and socialization proponents, one thing is evident: identity is in flux and can be transformed.

In general, the concept of identity has different meanings in the literature. What these various meanings have in common is the idea that identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon. Identity development occurs in an intersubjective field and can be best characterized as an ongoing process, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context. (Gee, 2001)

I think that the growing body of research on identity has benefited from rich narratives of individuals’ identities, but there are other theoretical frameworks that also serve to illuminate the issue. Those who support a symbolic interactionist stance hold that our identity and self-conception have a direct influence on our behaviour, the observable result of our identity (Stets & Turner, 2000). This is inextricably bound up with an emotional dimension, a dimension to which I shall return. We make distinctions between our “identity”, “professional identity”, and “role identity” as if these various identities were something that we take up and wear depending on our situation. As such, we are fracturing who we are in the service of what we do. It is impossible to categorize which parts of us belong to which of our identities, yet we tend to concentrate on the professional and role identities as our thrust in teacher education, because we have seen teaching as “behaviours”—as something we do, rather than seeing “teacher” as someone we “are”.⁴ I see a distinction between “Identity” [upper case], referring to how a person sees him- or herself in general, and “identity” [lower case], which I will use to refer to the individual identities we construct for the variety of contexts in which we exist.

Bernard’s discomfort with having to show only a part of her “I”-dentity raises a larger issue for evolving teachers: how do we self-identify? The question is not only how do we introduce ourselves to others, but how do we introduce ourselves to ourselves. Lest we equate music teacher education with psychotherapy, it is important to reiterate the point that the purpose of identity study in music teacher education is to improve the practice of music education. Exploring the identities that students bring with them to the teaching/learning context of teacher

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education acknowledges that students do not arrive in our classes as blank slates. They come with a rich prior knowledge of how music, musicians, teachers and classrooms “work” based on their own fifteen plus years spent as music makers and learners in a number of contexts. Too often we have not recognized this prior knowledge.

Through the process of provoking students to reflect on their prior beliefs and identities, they are given the opportunity to interrogate the experiences and assumptions upon which those identities were constructed. Translating this prior knowledge from the perspective of a student into teacher identity answers the question, “Who is the teacher that I am?” As well as informing students’ of potential biases that they might bring to teacher education, this also has the benefit of allowing students to make choices about the identity that they wish to construct in their on-going education.

The use of narrative or teacher-talk about their identity as a means of gaining insights into that identity is not without problems. The popular discourse of what teachers should be, culturally iconic teachers in literature and film (Brand & Hunt, 1997; Weber & Mitchell, 1999, 1995), and a host of personal and professional meta-narratives colour the way we represent ourselves. Fulwiler (1997) articulates this problem in the process of writing his teacher narrative:

It is at this point that I see more clearly a real conflict between the two most important intentions of this narrative—a conflict between my role as teacher and my role as writer [of the narrative]. To feel good about myself as a teacher, I need to feel knowledgeable, imaginative, resourceful, and relevant. And I need to believe in and celebrate (narrate) my classroom successes as much to affirm my own identity as to inform and enlighten others.... The writer in me knows that to tell better stories, I need to uncover the ordinary along with the exceptional, the dark along with the light, and admit to complications in my narrative. (p. 93-94)

Social Teachers

Philosopher Charles Taylor (1989) suggests that a person’s Identity has a reference to what he terms a “like-minded community”:

[O]ne cannot be a self on one’s own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition.... (p. 36)

Teacher educators MacIntyre, Latta & Olafson concur with the relational aspect of identity education in teacher education:

In our changing roles as teacher educators, we encourage our students to negotiate the acts of teaching and learning through adapting, building, and creating meaning in an ongoing reciprocal relationship between self and other. (2006, p. 89)

Taylor holds that in these relationships, embedded within a specialized community, we are able to create a framework for our Identity construction.

We speak of it [the question of identity] in these terms because the question is often spontaneously phrased by people in the form: Who am I? But this can't necessarily be answered by giving name and genealogy. What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand. (Taylor, 1989, p. 27)

In teacher education we become one of these defining communities, whether for good or in a normative sense.

It is not enough to merely allow students to assess where they as individuals “are”, but to give them access to experiences that will nurture emerging identities. This is where I think that the process of socialization comes into play. “Teacher” is a social construct (Lortie, 1979). As a social construct, there are various features of “being teacher” that can be shared in the process of socialization—one of the functions of teacher education (Frohlich, 2007). While Bernard (2005) makes the distinction between authors who claim that teacher education is socialization and herself as a constructionist, I think that she misses the subtleties of role socialization on the ongoing construction of teacher identity. I agree with her that, generally in teacher education, we have characterized ourselves as proselytizing our paradigm of music teaching instead of uncovering the individual’s beliefs and aspirations, teaching not just the technician in the teacher but the soul of the teacher, the spiritual, multi-dimensional being. But even when our focus is the latter process, the construction of the individual happens within a large social order. It is not only the socializing process of the classroom, but the greater cultural socialization—the images of “teacher” from classical and popular culture, as well as from our own episodic memories.

The work of Weber & Mitchell (1995, 1999) has demonstrated that this socialization process is very much alive and thriving, not always for the better. Their collection of drawings from hundreds of students has shown similar portrayals of the image of teacher, even from students of diverse backgrounds and experience. Weber and Mitchell propose that this cultural image of teacher has an effect on an individual's identity as teacher. It is important to continue to interrogate the images that we hold, and those that we present in our teacher education programmes.

Many times our "image" of teacher is a stereotypical one that we have inherited from times long ago, or as cultural icons in popular culture. As such, identity derived from socialization can stunt or hinder the development of an individual's teacher identity. Identity can also be used as a normative tool to keep some people from joining the conversation. Meiners (2002) holds that the archetypal identity of teacher as "Bountiful White Lady" has precluded some who cannot assume that identity from becoming teachers. In our teacher education classes are we promulgating an identity that is idealized, or stereotypical? So it is that we must constantly interrogate the process of socialization itself, as well as the assumptions, biases, and cultural normativity that it propagates by making the process visible. It is through continually bringing the individual voice into the community and allowing ourselves to question our experience and prior knowledge in dialogue with others that our evolving individual and collective identity will be nurtured and socialization interrogated.

Bringing ourselves to teach

As we tell teacher stories, share insights and memories of the classroom, we are sharing with each other what it's like to "be" a teacher. Hopefully, as teacher educators we have had experience with successful teacher identity. Sharing our experiences with our students allows them to experience our experiences (and that of their peers) vicariously. In so doing, individual students can try teacherly identities out for personal fit—rather like saying, "This is who I 'could' be".

In the service of allowing beginning teachers to explore who they already are as teachers, I ask them to reflect on "the teacher that I am." A second question my students answer is, "Who

is the teacher I would like to become?” It is in “imagining” who we would like to be as teachers (Dolloff, 1999) that the historical background and the community of teacher educators can aid in the construction of those components of Identity that are evolving in reference to the music classroom.

Lest I be accused of being merely “warm and fuzzy”, in addition to reflecting not only on who “I am” and “wish to become” as teachers, I think it is important to interrogate the “teacher I fear becoming”:

I will never be a teacher who is afraid of children’s ability. Nor will I feel the need to put kids down and condescend to them, to feel better about myself. I will never be abusive (in any way, especially emotionally). I don’t ever want to lose the excitement of trying new things. I don’t ever want to lose touch with how something I’m putting across is being received. (unpublished student journal entry)⁵



As developing teachers express what they consider negative features of teachers they have known or imagine, they are able to express those components of identity that they wish to avoid in their on-going construction. In later reflections this same student was able to make sense of her discomfort while observing in a classroom:

Now that I’m looking at [observation reflection] and my original reflection side-by-side, I realize that much of what I saw in Mr. X’s class was an enactment of the teacher who I feared to become, which explains quite clearly why the experience was so troubling to me. The entire first half of the year, I felt trapped in his mode and was miserable because it was not what I wanted to do, but playing the role of the volunteer and “naïve” student, I felt obliged to accept what I was seeing as “right” or “appropriate.” It wasn’t until the spring term that I felt that it was okay to reject what I was experiencing and find my own way. (2004, Year-end reflective paper)⁶



As I ponder the use of this “pedagogy of negation” (Cossentino, 2004) in my music teacher education classes I have been reminded of a story I read as a child. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, by Ursula Le Guin (1968) we meet Ged, a young wizard who is being pursued by a dark shadow that he has unleashed from between worlds. Ged realizes that he must discover the shadow’s name in order to escape it. It is only at the end, however, as a cornered Ged turns to face his pursuer, that he realizes it’s name and speaks it: “Ged”. From that day he was pursued no longer by the shadow and was fully himself. In the same way, it is in naming the boundaries that students place on their conceptions of practice that they formulate their identities.

Music Education's Identity

Adding to the issues of an individual's ambiguity of self-identification is the malaise of music education as a field in search of its own identity. This, in turn, has implications for those of us who work in music education at tertiary institutions. In a paper entitled, "Serving Two Masters: The Tensions of Music Education in the Academy", Jonathan Stephens and I examined this crisis of identity (Dolloff & Stephens, 2000). It is not just music educators, but music education as a practice that is fragmented in its identity.

The criteria by which the institutions of higher learning assess the work of the professoriate reinforce the lack of accurate definition of music educators who practice in these institutions. Thus, professors of music education are often not identified as, and indeed sometimes rarely see themselves as musicians, scholars or teachers. This lack of self-identity is systemic. Many of the students in music education programmes experience a conflict between their identity as a musician and their role as a teacher. This ambiguity of identity leads to indecisiveness in curricular decision making. (p. 2)

Roberts (1991 a/b, 2004) has done many in-depth studies of the problems of conflicting identities for undergraduate music students in his studies of musician identity versus teacher identity. I think that we must tread this path of this dyad carefully. The purpose is not to put these identities in opposition; for me the strength of Roberts' work lies in encouraging us to focus our situational goals—of being a performer in a given setting, or being a teacher. What is it we want to do in a given situation? What lenses are we using to analyze a situation?

Our institutions have forced our students to self-identify between those who do and those who teach. No less have our curricula, by teaching an "educational repertoire", reinforced the division between musician and teacher, as has been said elsewhere:

This creates a false division between music studied by musicians and music studied by teachers, and reinforces a culture of "school music" being somehow different than "music." Students experience dissonance as their former identity as students and musicians—built from years of practicing music—conflicts with that of their identity as "teacher." (Dolloff & Stephens, 2002, p. 4)

A unitary definition of "music teacher" is not possible. We fragment even the identity of music teacher into band director, choral conductor, general music teacher, music specialist, traditional musician, trained musician, elementary music teacher, middle school teacher . . . the

list goes on, and each one suggests a separate identity and role expectations. But we do ourselves a great disservice if we split our professional identity into only two parts—musician and teacher. Yes, music is our medium and teacher is our role, but the vastness of our personal biography brings so much more richness to the “I”-identity that we can bring to teaching than merely including more performance opportunities, particularly if those opportunities are not emotionally or spiritually satisfying for students. I can think of several pianists in one of my ensembles for whom required choir participation was regarded as 4 hours of sheer torture a week, rather than an opportunity to “make music” and nurture their “musician” identity. If “musician” is going to play a continuing role in the Identity of novice teachers, I think the issue is not that they continue to make music in their teacher preparation, but how they make music in- or, indeed, outside of teacher education.

Many degree students have a “love/hate” relationship with their “major” instrument; this, as much as the teacher education programme, can lead to a lack of music making on that instrument following the completion of the degree. This disenchantment could be the result of the pressure of performing for grades, the competition that may be present in the university setting, or finding more fulfillment in other musical experiences. Some of these alternatives to performing on their major instrument may take the form of composing, conducting, or learning a new musical tradition. One of my students, a voice major, came to music education as a second choice to a degree in vocal performance. Not feeling at home in music education or in concertizing, Anna’s world was turned upside down as she discovered the “musician” identity that was her true musician self:

“African drumming and dancing” was absolutely pivotal to the direction that my life has taken...I can’t imagine where I would be now without it. My life is definitely enriched because of it. (personal communication)⁷



It was from learning about herself as a musician in the traditional Ghanaian style that Anna learned about herself as both musician and teacher, and about her passion.

We often dismiss the music that we make in schools as not ‘real’ music making, insisting that we need to make music outside the school setting. It is very affirming of the music teacher identity when the music making that is shared within a community of student musicians in the

context of the classroom is musically satisfying. This was the experience of one teacher whom I interviewed as part of my doctoral research:

I felt every bit as much a musician as I did when I was performing the Brahms' Requiem.
Dolloff, 1994, p. 178

Just as the musician identity is part and parcel of our teacher identity and infuses who we are and what we do, so the reverse is true. The variation on the old adage that “you can take the teacher out of the classroom, but you can’t take the classroom out of the teacher” reveals more truth than is allowed by the light-hearted manner in which it is usually delivered. How does being engaged in teaching affect how we perform music, listen to music, compose music, talk about music? I know when I listen to music, even socially, I am always thinking, “How would I bring that into the classroom, how would I rehearse it, what class issues would it integrate with, I wonder if anyone has arranged that?” It is important that in the integration of “identities” we try not to split hairs, labeling the parts as if they were truly discrete entities.



“Man, I feel like a teacher!”⁸: Emotions and Teacher Identity

What is missing from most discussions of teacher identity in music is the role that emotion plays in the initial construction, as well as reconstruction and restoration, of our teacher identities. Elsewhere, I have examined the evidence of emotion in the depiction of our teacher identities through drawing (Dolloff, 2006). Here I will concentrate at the role of emotion in the on-going construction of identity as expressed in “teacher talk”.

Most of the teacher stories related in research studies have a tremendous emotional content. Students have experienced emotions in educational contexts and bring these to the understanding of the teaching/learning situation. They describe being happy, fulfilled, disappointed, devastated, and they project remembered feelings onto both their feelings as a teacher and on to how the teacher makes the students feel. Heather writes about characteristics that she looks for in a teacher:

I want a teacher who is approachable and never makes you feel like a disappointment.
(unpublished journal entry)⁹



As musicians we are exposed to conflicting beliefs about the relationship of emotion to music—mostly from the aesthetic music education tradition, which stresses a disinterested or distanced approach to music and music appreciation, a response “above” the emotions. Yet it is hard to deny the powerful affect that we experience when we participate in intense, moving musical experiences. We would all agree that music and music making is ripe with emotions and emotional potential. This emotional connection to music—the philosophical justification will have to wait for another paper—is often an important factor in why we came to music and music teaching in the first place. Indeed, Eliot Eisner (2000) has said that we should remember the passion and context that drew us to music in the first place and offer nothing less than that powerful experience to our students. Our own emotional engagement with music is an important component in who we are as music teachers. However, there has been little exploration of the role that emotions in general, and specific emotions, play in the evolving teacher identity.

Michalinos Zembylas (2003) uses a poststructuralist lens in discussing the place of emotion in identity formation. He maintains that:

1. The construction of teacher identity is at bottom affective, and is dependent upon power and agency, i.e., power is understood as forming the identity and providing the very condition of its trajectory;
2. An investigation of the emotional components of teacher identity yields a richer understanding of the teacher self. (p. 213)

Through his study of Catherine, a young science teacher, Zembylas was able to illustrate many of the same emotional scenarios I have heard in my teacher education classes, in teacher talk with practicing teachers, and that we find in reports containing teacher narratives (cf. Bernard, 2005). Zembylas proposes that emotional factors

played significant roles in the ways that Catherine constructed her sense of teacher-identity. Catherine considered emotions as extremely important in her sense of self-esteem and her identity formation. In her early years of science teaching a sense of guilt as well as deeply felt disappointment resulted from her feeling that she was not being as successful as she aspired to be. (Zembylas 2004. p.195)

I believe that this is not an uncommon story in a teacher’s early professional work. Many of my beginning student teachers express a similar disappointment in not being the teacher that they aspire to be. I experienced this same disconnect between aspirations and classroom life:



I remember that first meeting with class 8A so vividly. I was dressed for success, had planned and re-planned my first lesson. Newly minted as a teacher and Orff specialist I had prepared a challenging, fun body percussion experience for them. I had really enjoyed performing body percussion, and my greatest inspiration in my music teacher education had been learning Orff. In walked 8A. They were a rough and tumble lot, but, with the strains of “I have confidence...”¹⁰ ringing in my ears I launched into my body percussion question and answer activity. While the class was participating reasonably well, it was a young girl in the front row who challenged my fledgling identity. “Does she think we’re having fun?”, she said to her neighbour in a stage whisper. My, admittedly unrealistic, image of myself as the music teacher who could, create a nurturing, joyful classroom that enthralled one and all was immediately shaken and I began to feel guilty that I was in the wrong profession, and that another music teacher would have been able to create the enjoyment this girl now questioned. (unpublished reflective journal notes)

The emotional dimension of teacher identity begins even earlier than beginning teaching experiences, however. Awareness of the emotional life of classrooms grows out of emotional responses to teachers and from being a learner. Episodic memories are completely coloured by emotion. They are not always truthful, but they are always “real”. It is in the deconstructing of the memories, their meanings for personal belief, personal agency and personal practice, that this experiential knowledge becomes a resource for future practice. The following quotes came from an informal teacher education discussion about early learning memories.

Mrs. B. was my grade 3 homeroom teacher and the school music teacher. . . . I still have a book full of all the music stickers she gave to me. I was so proud of myself. It’s not what she taught me, it’s how she made me feel.

Later the emotional dimension was felt as an evaluating factor during the transition from student to teacher in my early teaching experiences.

I was scared to death at first, it was a definite confidence booster when I realized that I could do it.

By the end of the day I was extremely excited. Not only had I survived the first day, but I could already picture myself as a music teacher in the future.

Important to feeling successful as a teacher is a feeling of being able to affect others, a feeling of lending a positive spin to a student’s identity. Music education students were asked to complete the sentence “I really feel like a teacher when....” Some typical replies were:

- *My student says that she loves music class*

- *Someone feels different/better about music and life because of me*
- *I finish teaching my private students and they skip down the driveway after a great lesson*
- *When I see my choir or student actually enjoying their learning experience*
- *When I nurture a love for music (or whatever) in others*

For others, feeling “like” a teacher came in the form of feeling affirmed in their work:


- *I leave my student’s home (after private teaching) with warm fuzzies*
- *The students look up to me and say that I am a role model for them*
- *The student responds to something that I have taught*
- *I feel joy in a student’s response*
- *When I say things to my brother and he actually listens*

Still others equated successful pedagogical strategies and teacher activities as keys to feeling “like” a teacher:

- *My little student Gabrielle started reading notes and rhythms on my first try teaching it*
- *Normal daily situations that occur in life cause ideas in my head to develop about how I can use them in a classroom*
- *I’m correcting wrong notes*
- *I help people figure things out*

Following the framework used by Zembylas (2003), I would submit that these students found that their identities were reaffirmed in situations that resulted in positive emotions (e.g., “*I feel joy in a student’s response*”). Conversely, identity is challenged or unsatisfactorily confirmed when a situation results in negative emotion (e.g., “*Does she think we’re having fun?*”).

I would like to suggest that as we are choosing elements in the construction of our Identities (in general) and our music teacher identities (in particular), we choose elements from experiences that we enjoyed, that we value(d); experiences that make us feel valued, and that make us feel successful. Consider this recent communication from a young teacher who is struggling to build her teacher identity and, hence, who is considering leaving teaching:



I was kind of thinking today that “X school” may not be the end of the world if I get stuck staying again. A couple of really nice things happened—I put my choir through a 2+ hour mega rehearsal after school and then threw them a pizza party for putting up with me. It was the Hatfield [composer, Stephen Hatfield] wow effect - the moment where it finally comes together. “Camino, Caminante” –and it did! Then I took them outside to play until their parents came after we ate pizza and one of the girls started skipping across the play structure singing “Oh, oh when we travel...” [a line from the song]. And then another girl started with “Freedom is Coming” which we did close to 2 years ago now. Since reading the Campbell¹¹ book, I’m always so aware of music during play. So I am making an impression. And then as I was leaving school at 7:30, I passed a child from kindergarten who I don’t teach. She lit up from like half a block away and told me “You teach music at my school.” It was sweet. (private communication, 2007¹²)

Affects of legitimization on identity

Besides our own subjective construction of identity, there is another factor that deeply affects how we construct our personal identities. The “legitimation” process (Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1999) wields an enormous effect on identity: no matter how well you perform the role, if others don’t accept you as a “teacher” then you are not. Although we are aiming at bringing all of the components of Identity into harmony through our music making, our teaching, our parenting, our caring nature (etc.), others may still have very vocal opinions about how *they* “see” our Identity—often based on where, who and what we teach. There are cultural hierarchies of subject matter determined in schools that bring pressures to bear on music teacher identity. Music educators have recognized and have bemoaned the devaluing of music programmes through cuts and sanctions. The result is a sense of professional disappointment and frustration. Educational scholars have articulated this in terms of beliefs and subject matter:

A subject matter is accorded status and prestige in accordance with the norms of the school culture. Teachers’ behavior [sic] and beliefs influence others’ perceptions of their subject area. That is, the way teachers perceive their subject and convey those perceptions, influences the perceptions other have of their subject. And as teachers are identified with the subject area in which they teach, their identity is inextricably linked to how other in the school identify and define their subject. (Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1999, p. 155)

The discussion of perception of subject matter by Schempp et al. reminds me of an influential time in the establishment of my own identity. In the beginning of my professional career I taught music in kindergarten through 8th grade at a public school. On one of my outdoor recess duties I

was surrounded by the gaggle of my young students whose perpetual joy it was to accompany the supervising duty teacher on her rounds of the playground. The discussion turned serious when one of the young students began to complain about difficulties in math class. When I suggested a strategy to help, all the students looked at me incredulously and an 8-year old asked, “You mean you’re a REAL teacher?” That innocent question betrayed a huge cultural perception of what it means to be a music teacher.

Society has already informed our incoming music teacher education students that there is something different about being a teacher of music. In fact many of us can relate stories of being ostracized by colleagues, not taken seriously by administrators, not included in the “academic” parts of school. Some of us may have even seen ourselves as “different” from teachers of other subjects. As music teachers we are often called upon to cross more professional lines, I think, than the classroom math teacher. The question for me is not “Why do more classroom music teachers not continue to perform”, but “Where do these musician/teachers find the time to maintain performing, family and teaching?” Again it comes down to a matter of balance. I think that this has a direct link to our Identity and to our emotional investment in it. If we are rewarded emotionally for a component of who we are and what we do we will continue to strengthen that segment of our Identity. For me, one reason that we lose so many teachers in the first few years of practice is that the emotional payback for teaching may not be as great as that from performing, composing, or being a parent, no matter how altruistic our intentions might be. In addition to a slim emotional affirmation of teacher identity, the emotional toll of teaching on one’s Identity as a successful, loved individual can be devastating.

All the things we are: toward the “whole” teacher

Bernard (2005) proposes that identity construction is fundamental to her “new” model of music teacher education. If we are predicating our teacher education programmes on the notion that we can define the identity of a music educator, then we are doing our students—and their students—a great disservice. In the quest for new models of teacher education, do we place our emphasis on forming an identity or replacing inefficient or dysfunctional teacher identities, instead of creating the opportunities to explore and nurture their still developing identities? Are we in too

much of a hurry for a product? Beijaard and his colleagues conclude that teacher identity is not only an answer to the question ‘Who am I at this moment?’ but also an answer to the question: ‘Who do I want to become?’ Seeing professional identity as an ongoing process implies that it is dynamic, not stable or fixed. (p. 762)

Our teacher education programmes must allow students to articulate for themselves what it is they “think” they are doing when they teach—to articulate their goals and philosophy of practice. Many times students base their goals and philosophy on the episodic knowledge gained through their own musical experiences. This has been discussed elsewhere by Roberts (1991a/b), Bouij (2006) and others. Their concern is that the powerful episodic memory of studio teaching and learning leads to a mismatch with the demands and requirements of music classrooms consisting of multiple and varied learners.

Not only are our identities multiple and complex, they are also fluid, ever shifting, and the components combine in creating varied and new harmonies. Who we think we “are” as music teachers is constantly changing. We negotiate our identities from moment to moment, constructing ourselves in response to where we find ourselves, what we must do, and whom we are with. To engage an individual in discussing “Identity” of necessity freezes that identity in time and space. When we ask the question about an individual’s Identity, we can only expect the answer, “This is who I am here and now.” Of necessity we should take such a snapshot in order to catch a glimpse of who we are at the moment. Yet, even asking the question changes the answer as we engage in reflection. This reflection leads to greater understanding of “who” it is we bring to teaching, allowing teacher education students to be both students and architects of their own teacher development.

Teacher education programmes do not exist independently of those who teach in them. Therefore, for teacher education programmes to change there must be a change in way that music teacher educators approach their own identities as teachers and musicians. As Bernard (2005) has demonstrated in her own reflections on self identification, teacher educators need to question “who” they are constantly becoming and be open to the possibility of the evolution of “who” and “how” they are in our classrooms. In this view, learning to teach is learning how to use who you are effectively and ethically—all parts, musical, artistic, sports-minded, and so on.

I propose that this is the best application of identity work, in both research and pedagogy; to increase the ability to bring all the things “we are” to music teacher education.

Notes

¹ A paraphrase of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians 13:12

² There are significant bodies of research that examine the distinctions between “self” and “identity”. Each is intergral to the other and it would take several articles to explore this distinction.

³ I first used reference to Mischler’s work in Dolloff (2006). My premise is repeated in part here.

⁴ I am indebted to Jonathan Stephens for first drawing this distinction to my attention in conversation. He has articulated it in Stephens (1995).

⁵ Used with permission.

⁶ Used with permission.

⁷ Used with permission.

⁸ With apologies to Shania Twain

⁹ Used with permission

¹⁰ This is the song that “Maria” sings in the movie version of the “Sound of Music” as she is walking toward the Von Trapp household to meet her new charges. During my first days of teaching it was my mantra.

¹¹ Sheehan-Campbell, P. (2000).

¹² Used with permission.

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