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Making Music, Making Selves, Making it Right: A counterpoint to Rhoda Bernard

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Not to put too fine a point on it, the Bernard (2005) paper “Making Music, Making Selves” is seriously flawed in research design, literature review and, more importantly, in its conclusions. I think we should get the important stuff stated up front.

Identity announcements

Bernard opens her paper by bemoaning the limitations of personal introductions at academic conferences. As she writes, we typically offer little more than “name, rank and serial number of the academy” (Bernard, 2005, p. 2). She is distressed because she sees herself as so much more than the limits of her introduction can display. One thing that is absolutely consistent throughout the paper, however, is that she is the Chair of Music Education at the Boston Conservatory. In fact, this assertion is the one constant in the many reiterations of this theme throughout the paper and, along with the limited “name, rank and serial number,” are no more than Stone (1970) calls identity “announcements.” Identity announcements can be powerful indicators into how the social Actor sees herself in relation to a social setting. So powerful, in fact, that I used this very novel idea of “announcement” in my paper “Who’s in the Mirror” (Roberts, 2004) where I first had myself be introduced by the moderator as a “sociology-doing-scholar” before being re-introduced somewhat later in the lecture as a “musician-doing-scholar.”

Identity as situated

Bernard’s hammering of the idea of self as having multiple identities is well taken, but today it is more than accepted as a given. The problem is not that we have multiple or even conflicting

identities but where these identities are attempted to be played out. This is one place where Bernard gets into deep trouble. While Bernard claims to be studying the “professional identities of school music teachers” (p. 4) she later builds her argument on her subject Lorraine’s giving “concerts in her spare time” (p. 21). She gets closer to unpacking the mystery when she writes that “only who I am as a researcher matters” (p. 3). Identity is situated: that much we can now take for granted despite Bernard’s fussing. When I teach my music education elementary methods course I do not consider nor “announce” my other identity as a pilot. When I am asked to review research proposals for the major grant awarding agency in Canada, I am not wearing my tenor-singing hat. When I am on stage singing *Tamino* I am not giving much time to worrying over *ta’s* and *ti-ti’s* from my methods class.

It is what “matters” to Others that, in fact, does matter. The audience “matters” when I perform in an opera. They want to hear high C’s not a lecture on the importance of Kodaly or Orff. Furthermore I cannot support my identity as a performer in a methods class or school classroom if I am functioning in a manner that matters to the Others who must participate in my identity construction. So our announcements of identity must be situated where they will be acted upon and supported by Others. The exception to this in music is for people to make identity announcements that will serve to excuse their social performance in the situation. This happens when school teachers at conferences announce that they are classroom teachers giving an account of something being researched in a classroom and claiming that they are not ‘really’ researchers. Performers sometimes announce that they are amateurs, or dentists, or music teachers, not ‘real’ performers, to excuse an impending less than perfect performance. The apology announcement is often warranted and serves as a sort of rule setting for Others who must participate in a situation. They serve in these instances to lower expectation, thereby according the social Actor positive support for an otherwise weak identity.

In any case, I think we should agree that we have many “identities” and that these are positioned in our Self according to the situation in which the identity is required, and perhaps more importantly, supported by Others.

Identity construction and context(s)

I also take issue with Bernard's conception of identity. She first claims that identity is "processual, as positions and contexts" (p. 5). She goes on to add that these constantly shift and are constructed on multiple levels. Despite the claim of process, identity in Bernard's model is largely static. She offers gender, age, class, race, ethnicity and status as well as several role labels such as musician, teacher and researcher to build her case for identity. While these may play a part in the construction of an Actor's identity, they do not in any way solve the mystery. They are, necessary but insufficient! They are necessary because they are largely unavoidable. I cannot change my gender, age, race or the like from one situation to another so these static factors will always play some part in how my identity is constructed; but, more than anything else, a satisfactory identity is constructed by the support of Others. Social actors tend to create roles for themselves which they then try to inhabit. These are not "role-taking" or static roles from a list but self constructed roles that an Actor can hope to sustain by interactional support. Turner (1969, p. 22) writes that this "role-making" approach has "less interest in determining the exact roles in a group and the specific content of each role than in observing the basic tendency for actors to behave *as if* there were roles (emphasis in original)." McCall and Simmons (1978) support this idea when they write that an actor's identity is "the character and the role that an individual devises for himself as an occupant of a particular social position. More intuitively, such a role-identity is his imaginative view of himself *as he likes to think of himself being and acting* as an occupant of that position" (p. 65; emphasis in original).

Therefore, simply to suggest that much of an identity is in positions or contexts seems to miss the point. In the first instance we should not any longer set out to support roles that we have pre-determined to exist nor that we have pre-defined. While Bernard suggests that "we negotiate the meaning of our identities" (p. 5), she never seems to consider how this is done. She does give a glimpse into how she constructs her own imaginative view of self. This seems to be based on her interpretation of some well known "social constructionists." But she moves away from standard theory to assert her view of multiple identities as layers. This is probably not a good description as it implies a positional view where the top or bottom of the pile of identities might be visible while one might have to dig to find others. A more common understanding might be to

suggest that various identities appear foremost in the situation in which that identity may be supported. In other words, when performing I expose my performer self and when teaching I use more of a teacher identity and when flying I assume my pilot identity (even if I should whistle a good tune at the same time).

Identity and Other(s)

Bernard goes on to explain where she departs from the standard identity construction model by claiming that identity construction takes place simultaneously on three levels: individual, social, and cultural (p. 6). She further claims that the standard theory suggests that identity is constructed only on the social level. It is a further confusion when she then defines her concept of identity as being constructed through personal associations. I am only confused because it is unclear how interpersonal (between persons) and social are distinguished. Furthermore, there is a strongly accepted notion of “self as other” in identity paradigms, where the discourse that the Actor may engage in is with “the self”, thereby remaining “individual.” I mention this largely because the immediate conclusion that Bernard strikes is that her conception of the academic introduction doesn’t fit with her *total self-view* because it “privileges only one layer of a person’s identity” (p. 7). Despite her claim that identity is constructed in individual, social, and cultural interaction she seems to have missed the obvious point that the academic introduction as she describes it does not privilege anything. It is merely a matter of situational expectation – a social or cultural ritual. I am not at all sure how she can claim that this might be a privileged identity presentation unless she felt inadequate to support a role as a legitimate researcher in that environment. By insisting on a more inclusive introduction, it may signify more a desire to compensate in one area by holding out one’s other identities as also meaningful.

Most identity scholars hold that we act on the identity or try to get support for the identity most in need of support at any given time. McCall and Simmons state unequivocally that “those identities most in need of support are more likely to be acted upon” (1978, p. 81). So in a setting where one would be expected to be a researcher, trying to divert support from other identity components seems rather trivial – or at least could be said to be of little interest to the Other in the room. The Other may have little or no interest in what alternative identities you may wish to

support in an interactional environment dedicated to, or at least primarily concerned with one facet of a person's multiple identity complex. Furthermore, the Other in these alternative identities may not be "significant." By that I mean that I would take little notice of identity support from a trumpet player to support my identity as a pilot.

The literature

I would assert therefore, that when Bernard suggests that her conception of identity is absent in the literature it well may be that the reason is that her conception is largely flawed to the point where it is not sustainable by the vast literature which precedes it. There have been times when there have been drastic paradigm shifts in sociological thought and some of that literature presents fiery diatribes against the former way of thought. I think my favourite may be the wonderful lashing offered by Coulson (1972) where the concept of role as a static concept is trashed.

Bernard asserts that the literature has generally "pitted against one another music making and music teaching" or described the conflict between musician and teacher "as disabling, as in need of some sort of resolution" (p.7). This is where Bernard's argument again goes off the rails. Her suggestion that the literature is based on static "roles" misreads and misreports the majority of the literature. Certainly, as the grandfather of much of this literature I can attest to the fact that our conception is much more grounded on the conception by Turner presented above. Furthermore, at this point Bernard begins unwittingly to drift away from identity and discusses music-making and music-teaching. Neither of these is an "identity" but rather an activity. Both are closer to the static role model she seems denigrate. Many people play or sing yet refuse to identify themselves as "performers." *Identity comes from an actor's assertion which is subsequently supported by Other.*

Because Bernard ends her essay with suggestions for teacher education, it may be fruitful to jump into that earlier here than later. The assertion that musicians ought to be converted into teachers or that the socialization ideal is to supplant a teacher identity onto or otherwise suffocate the musician identity is not the predominant theme in any of the literature. Students who enter university to study music, even those whose goal is to become a music teacher, must pass

through the gatekeepers of the music school's portals (see Mark (1998) for example). As these young music students engage themselves in the music school community, they quickly are engulfed with the necessity of developing or at least "announcing" a master status identity as a performer (or minimally as a musician) (see Roberts [1991] for a full account of this). Therefore to assert that those of us "working and writing in the field of music education place a higher value on the teaching of the pre-service music educators than on their music making" (Bernard, 2005, p. 10) seems oddly foolish, especially given the dearth of music education studies in comparison to those exploring the development of "musician" identity (through theory, history, studio, ensembles).

Firstly, the students who apply either mid-stream in their music program or after the completion of a music degree simply come to us as "musicians". Secondly, I can be supportive of my students' music-making activities but my responsibilities are to teach these self-identified musicians to become teachers. In fact, my immediate music education colleagues and I continue to have very extensive "music-making" lives (and identities). I know of no place in the serious literature that scholars of identity in music education are calling for the replacement of the musician identity or, in fact, for the abandonment of the music-making identity or activity by music teachers. Bernard simply misses the point here altogether: In fact, my call for a never-ending personal war between our musician and teacher identities is precisely the point in this whole engagement.

Identity, music-making, and teaching

One of the biggest surprises in my own interviewing for the research reported in Roberts (1991) was the answer I received for the question, "What is the outcome of getting a performance degree from this or that university music department?" The consistent response for all five universities in my study was that the result of a performance degree was that the graduates never touched their instrument again. While this appears very harsh, the reality is much closer to the truth of the answer. There are obviously many exceptions, and every good music department will produce performance majors who continue to lead full and rewarding musical lives; but, for many, the instrument gets put away after the graduates search in vain for employment in their

performance field and resort to working in areas totally removed from the musical life they enjoyed as a performance major in our major universities.

On the other hand, for the music teacher who was the object of low status and whose identity in the music school as a performer was often stigmatized, the future in music-making is often bright and fulfilled. At a recent symphony concert where Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was being performed, I was sitting at the rehearsal with one of my colleagues who had been responsible for preparing the choir for the evening and we were commenting on the large number of music teachers in both the choir and the orchestra. By comparison, our performance major graduates were not equally well represented.

Our concern in education is to build a strong identity as a teacher alongside of the identity as a performer or musician that our students bring to us in the middle of their university life. To claim that music teacher educators have an agenda to diminish or throttle the musician identity in our developing teachers is both absurd and simply foolish.

We are, however, cognizant that there are musicians or performers who enter our profession as a "back-up," or in order to take advantage of the music-making opportunities that teachers have in our communities, and that these individuals are not the least interested in becoming a teacher. In fact, they may be what would be called the "failed performer." It is not that they continue to perform that is at issue; but it is sad that they don't accept themselves within the professional community of teachers. In this regard, as Goffman (1952, p.505) writes, "No doubt there are few positions in life that do not throw together some persons who are there by virtue of failure and other persons who are there by virtue of success. In this sense the dead are sorted but not segregated, and continue to walk among the living."

Researching identity

Bernard's difficulties start early in her work. In fact, her assertion that she *starts* with "different ideas about who music teachers are" (p. 10) gives us a clue as to the potential for disaster. A better approach may have been to go and see who music teachers are and develop her thoughts about it after the investigation rather than before. By searching out teachers for her study who seem to support her own distorted notion of what music teacher identity may be, she cannot be

responsive to much found in other studies that contradicts her initial thesis. She seems to be guilty of the reification of her own misconstrued version of the issue.

One clue that leads me to a better understanding of where Bernard may have fallen into uncharted waters is when she writes that the context for the teachers in her study includes “district-wide music departments where the musician-teachers relate to their local colleagues” (p. 14). With the exception of Bouij’s (1998) extensive study of teachers in a municipal school system, previous studies and commentary on teacher identity in music have tried, for the most part, to focus on music teachers whose interaction in school is mainly with school administrators and other teachers. This is a completely different workplace reality than for those teachers whose professional role as a musician can be supported or encouraged by many other like-minded and identity-seeking individuals in a system-wide music department. The vast majority of music teachers in schools work in isolation from any other musicians and are not in a position to have much of their musician identity supported; indeed, they are not even acknowledged as particularly significant by the other professional teachers around them. If musicians are working in large system-wide departments along side many other musician teachers, that is to say where the majority of the colleagues they encounter are similar musician teachers, then it may be possible to support a version of themselves as performers despite the day-to-day realities of working as teachers. My own writing has been to challenge music teachers to continue their music-making in the face of a professional environment where their identity as a musician is not supported. This advocacy is in direct contrast to Bernard’s somewhat masked assertion that the literature wants music teachers to abandon their music-making.

There is, however, a real study here. The question that should be asked is, “How does the identity construction of music teachers working in system-wide music departments differ from school-based music educators?”

Conclusions about conclusions

Finally I would like to turn to the conclusions of Bernard’s paper. Firstly, I would suggest that Bernard has not listened to the discourses of our students. By carefully selecting teachers who met her closed criteria for musician activity she has begun from a point that makes her study

opaque. Most of the literature on identity construction begins with quite a different premise. It begins by asking how students or teachers make sense of the world and, through discovery, comes to unpack the social realities that are exposed as a result. The large body of research does not begin with a presumption of identity construction imperatives.

Secondly, I do not believe that any of the current literature tries in any way to denigrate, or otherwise diminish the musical life of music teachers or music education students. While there has been much written to suggest that students need to construct teacher identities alongside their already quite well-formed “musician” or “performer” identities in order to undertake the “teacherly” role-function as situated in schools, there is no literature that I can think of that actually suggests that we need to diminish the “musician” part of a music teacher’s identity complex. In fact, it is not uncommon in music schools for the very people who are responsible for the delivery of the music education program also to be excellent models to point towards in the battle of maintaining an active performer identity. Many, for example, direct ensembles. We can lead by example, not just assignment. We do as much as possible by example to show the importance of continuing a full musical life *and* show students how, as teachers in the school system, this is possible.

And thirdly, students who enter music departments do so for the most part because of a love of music developed in performance (see Roberts et al. [1993]). To suggest that we should create opportunities for our students to think about and articulate the ways that music is personally relevant to them (p. 28) seems to ignore or discount their very reason for being there in the first place. In other words, in this suggestion our students are already well out front of us.

Bernard is distressed by the fact her formal introduction fails to engage an audience in the fullness of her “whole person.” Yet at the same time, she proposes to support an identity construction that is based on a single layer of the music teachers’ life, that of being first and foremost a “musician,” and forges a path away from the occupational reality that teachers work in schools with other teachers from whom each provides the very necessary identity support for the common role that they all play in their own drama of teaching our children.

The evidence supporting the need to convert “musicians” into “music teachers” (or “educators”) is overwhelming and cannot be dismissed by selecting a data from a different pool.

It is also important to mention here that this “conversion” is not simply a different word for “replacement.” The authors of the vast literature that pre-dates this study are recommending constructing and combining a teacher identity with the musician identity which typically dominates the Self on arrival at teacher education courses and programs. Again to suggest that music education scholars who have engaged in the study of identity construction are somehow anti-musician is to read the literature incorrectly. The literature virtually uniformly argues for the addition of a “teacherly” Self and certainly not the replacement of the musician Self. I can only repeat what I have said many times before: that our effectiveness in the classroom depends upon being both strong teachers and strong musicians and that furthermore, the personal war we wage with ourselves to maintain a balance with these two identities is critical to our success in the classroom.

Other colleagues have commented to me about the low number of subjects in Bernard’s research but I take little issue with that because one of the strongest and best illustrated research studies on the musician-to-teacher identity shift remains the rather brilliant account offered by Peter de Vries in his 1999 dissertation from Griffith University in Australia, “The researcher as subject: using autobiography to examine the nature of being a classroom primary school music teacher.” Unfortunately, this important study was missing from Bernard’s literature – unfortunate because it provides an exceptional account of how this once university music student modified his identity from performer to teacher as he moved through his life history.

I hope that readers will be able to see though the rather glaring holes in the Bernard study that leave the true nature of music teacher identity largely unexplored. Seeking a truth from a sample of subjects who meet a fixed impression of outcome seems rather less than appealing to me as a researcher. Our mysteries cannot be unpacked if we just go searching for confirmation of our own agenda, particularly when we are unaware that the agenda is so fundamentally ill-conceived.

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