

Chapter 12

Facilitating for Future Colleagues – Sharing of Experiences in the Field of Music Teacher Practicum

A Task for the Mastering Guru or
the Mentoring Critical Friend?¹

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In the last four years I have been involved in a research project about educational quality in Nordic music teacher education, where the subject of *musikdidaktik*² constituted a case where teachers' and student teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning quality offered a bottom-up perspective (Ferm, 2008; Ferm Thorgersen, 2010; Ferm & Johansen, 2008). The specific areas that were treated in the interviews were student teachers' learning, identity, and choice of content. The interview material was analysed from different angles based on different ontological starting-points, and one outcome of that research is that practicum is closely connected to the *didaktik* subject, and that learning in *musikdidaktik* demands lon-

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2 *Musikdidaktik* is a central subject within music teacher education where theories of teaching and related learning of music are treated.

ger periods and more relevant parts of practicum that are connected to the *didaktik* education. My interest in the combination of action and reflection, not at least in professional education, together with a common interest in how learning in and between different areas constitutes music teachers' professional competence, and not at least curiosity about how practicum functions as a teaching subject, led to the development of the research project. To interview supervising teachers and student teachers, engaged in instrumental and classroom practicum, became a natural way of continuing the project. Teacher education is in continuous change and nowadays questions are common about what role practicum should play in teacher education, what learning should be encouraged there in what ways, and how it should be evaluated and by whom. At the same time syllabuses and other governing documents are changing as well as expectations from school leaders, pupils and parents. In other words, the everyday professional life of music teachers, where the practicum takes place, is a changing world. Therefore it is interesting to shed light on supervising in that area from a supervisor perspective. What are the stories about supervising future colleagues about? I believe such stories may be interesting and make up a basis for a nuanced discussion about what supervising in those situations may be like and what consequences different approaches may have for music teacher education and future music teachers. This paper will communicate the result of a narrative analysis of eight teachers' stories about supervising music student teachers in practicum.

The aim of the study was to illuminate, analyse and try to understand the stories about the function, task, and aim of supervising practicum in music teacher education from a life-world phenomenological perspective, through supervisors' perceptions and experiences related to teaching and learning quality.

Ontological Points of Departure

The study presented in the current paper is based on a life-world phenomenological way of thinking about the world. This kind of thinking implies that human beings are indissolubly connected to the world. Consequently the one and only access to the world is through human beings' lived experiences. To understand the world, it is crucial to understand how it is experienced, and that is why it is important to access the lived worlds of human beings. Life-world phenomenological research wants to come close to the things themselves, to let them show themselves, through hu-

man beings' varied experiences of them (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1945). This kind of research has to be turned towards the things, and to be adapted to the things themselves (Bengtsson, 1998).

The phenomenon studied in the current presentation is supervision within the field of practicum. Using interview and narrative analyses seemed to be relevant methods in relation to this phenomenon, as access to a varied number of lived experiences of supervision in the specific context was demanded. The study is designed in accordance with this way of thinking. The interviews aimed to come close to the lived world of the supervising teachers and contribute to a varied and wide picture of the phenomenon. The narrative analysis attempts to be open for and adaptable to the phenomenon and through variation and reduction help to show the phenomenon from two rich perspectives. Bowman (2006) underlines that narrative inquiry also attempts to understand music and music education from the bottom up and from the inside out, which harmonizes well with a life-world phenomenological way of thinking. He emphasises that it draws its force from everyday details that highlight events and experiences rather than logic.

Related Research

Research concerning music teacher education has internationally been investigating program evaluations and case studies of future and newly appointed teachers in music, often connected to general teacher education (Colwell, 1992; Leglar, 1993; Lehman, 1992). Several of these investigations (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996; Zeichner, 1986; Yourn, 2000) stress that the practical part of teacher education is the most important one.

International research (cf. Conway, 2002) shows that the number of tasks for supervisors in practicum has increased and developed, since the practicum is seen as a more and more important part of teacher education. The supervisors are more or less expected to have oversight, to be able to supervise and to organise the professional development of future music teachers. They are e.g. responsible for organising the school experience within the school setting, advising on teaching practices, making links to theory, introducing trainee teachers to wider roles for teachers in schools and society, observing trainee teachers, commenting upon their work, and evaluating and reporting on their actions in practice (Sinclair, 1997).

Franke & Dahlgren (1996) performed a phenomenographic study of conceptions of mentoring, paying attention to practicum as an occasion

for practice versus an object for reflection, which gives implications for the supervisor's role. They stressed that the teacher apprenticeship model dominated research in Sweden and USA at that time. The discussions concerned how teaching should be and is planned and carried out, and questions about why teaching is conducted in this way are more rarely discussed. According to this view, trainee teachers are trained in mastering methods and techniques without connected reflections.

It has also been stated that the influence from the supervising teacher is strong when it comes to how student teachers develop their practical theory of teaching (Kettle & Sellars, 1996). Tensions in the relations between student teachers and supervising teachers have been of interest to educational research connected to practicum, as well as social role-taking and critical friendship (Kettle & Sellars, 1996; Reiman, 1999). The mentoring role of the supervisor is underlined and defined as involving instructing, teaching, counselling and assessing, which implies real power and responsibility in the educational processes (Jaques, 1992). The mentoring includes offering the student teachers insights into the teaching profession as a multifaceted skill.

One way of categorizing supervisors into two groups is the "guru" and the "critical friend", as Handal (2006) suggests. The guru is a model who handles the activity in the first person, which is updated and knows how. This kind of supervisor is skilled in the profession and is able to model, show and demonstrate. S/ he shows and instructs, lets the student teacher try and then confirms or corrects. The guru is fairly specialized when it comes to subject and level and gathers her/ his learners around her/him. The focus is directed towards action and the conversations are concerned with practice. Steering, instruction, and authoritative counselling influence the relations between the guru and her/his student teachers.

The critical friend, on the other hand, is more analytical and interpretative in relation to professional practice. S/he uses concepts, theoretical tools, models and perspectives to make the student teacher reflect upon and gain an insight into the profession and the personal learning. The critical friend is a skilled practitioner as well, but s/he does not use her/ his knowledge in the same way. Her/his experience and expertise are used to make student teachers understand the challenges and choices of the professional role. The focus is directed towards reflection and the conversations are concerned with practice. Such conversations are also seen as important in the supervising activities. One aim of this tradition is that the student teacher develop both action and reflection skills. The relations

between the critical friend and her/his student teachers are influenced by questions, challenges, support and problematizing (Handal, 2006).

Method – from Interview to Story

To get access to the life-world of supervising music teachers within the field of practical music teacher education, eight supervising teachers from Norway and Sweden were interviewed. The intention was that the supervisors should represent classroom as well as instrumental practicum, both genders and variation regarding ages and amount of supervising experience. The interviews concerned the themes of student teachers' learning, identity and choices of content and lasted for about one hour each. The conversations were recorded and transcribed and constituted a material that in turn communicated stories about supervising. The interviews with the chosen supervisors' different experiences were about supervising done in 2009 in ordinary schools, music schools and training schools connected to conservatoires in Norway and Sweden. They communicate a variety of values concerning teaching, learning and music connected to and developed in different cultures.

My intention was to write out the constructed stories close to the stories of the interviewees in an unreduced way, and at the same time communicate strict results. The risk is that the constructed narratives communicate two extreme types of supervisors. Therefore I have tried to use the language of the interviewees, to guarantee that they recognize their values, intentions and actions, which are crucial in a result of narrative analysis (Bowman, 2006). My intention is to not connect the two types of supervisors to one specific situation or culture each. Instead I aim to lift them up to make it possible to connect them to any supervising situation and make reflections in relation to quality, views of teaching and learning as well as possible organisation.

Result – the Mastering Guru and the Mentoring Critical Friend

Two different stories, which appeared in the collected material, clarify some values, traditions, choices and approaches to supervising in the field of practicum. The concepts of *the guru* and *the critical friend* (Handal,

2006) in combination with the concepts *mastering* and *mentoring* (Jaques, 1992) seemed to define the types of supervisors that the stories uncover. I present the stories one by one to make it possible to grasp them as whole stories. To facilitate the reading, the two stories follow the same structure. The stories concern involvement in the same issues: roles and relationships, functions and goals, and frustrations, but they communicate different perspectives and different ways of approaching. First I present the story of the mastering guru, and then the story of the mentoring critical friend. The stories are told in the first person and the quotations are exact expressions from the interviewees.

The Mastering Guru

Roles and relationships. My role as a supervisor is first and foremost to be a role model. My task is to show how teaching of music can, or should, be done, in other words to mediate a bank of repertoire and tools. It is crucial for the student teachers to acquaint themselves with the material I use, and the actions I perform. I also think it is really important for me to be clear about my standpoints, I believe that is an important prerequisite for a developing discussion between me and the student teachers. “I think I am employed here to pour out my cleverness. I tell them that they have to value all I say, and I don’t hide what I think is bad teaching. / . . . / They have to defend themselves, and of course I motivate my comments.” My task is also to enthuse the student teachers, by being a committed role model. The role of the student teachers is to define the problems, and develop their way of teaching from my modelling.

Functions and goals. The function of the practicum is to let the student teachers become inspiring skilled teachers who like their job. The practicum functions as an arena where the student teachers can get access to methods and models, primarily through observation of “the best teachers”, who are also active musicians. It is crucial for the student teachers to acquaint themselves with the actions and experiences of these teachers. “They learn my ideas and rules and hopefully make them their own”. It is important that the student teachers learn methods, and in what order different aspects of music should be learnt before they do their own teaching. They have to collect a variety of ingredients to be able to choose their own best medicine for each pupil. The ingredients may for example be techniques, embouchure or ways of reading pupils. But the function is also that the student teachers get an opportunity to try teaching at different

levels, to become safer in their role, to believe in themselves, and to be able to be present in the situation. They need to learn to be kind but clear, to read and meet the pupils, their different learning styles and behaviour, and to reflect on their own actions. In other words “the goals have not changed very much since I did my own practicum 20 years ago”.

Frustrations. When it comes to what frustrations I struggle with as a supervisor in music teacher practicum, one aspect among others is that the trainee teachers have to teach before they know how to do it. “When they start fumbling I think, poor pupils, I would never put my children there”. And I would never let them take over my pupils, never. They have to study real teaching in practice first, and that is connected with another dilemma, which is that the student teachers haven’t had very good role models themselves. I see that they have problems with reading their pupils. To learn to teach music is a slow process, and the time scheduled for practicum is too short. We just have time to concentrate on the details, at the expense of the larger visions. And in addition, I experience observing student teachers’ teaching as really boring; I have problems with just sitting there.

This is connected with the problem that it is unclear what we are examining. What should the student teachers be able to do when they finish their practicum and are allowed to teach music as a profession? The criteria make it almost impossible not to let the student teachers pass.

The Mentoring Critical Friend

Roles and relationships. My task as a supervisor is to teach the student teachers to teach through adapting the teaching situation to the trainee teachers’ needs, interests and abilities. It is all about creating a secure, but also challenging milieu where they feel they can try out and develop their teaching skills. “They learn from most of their ‘near’ mistakes”. So I don’t want any observers, I want them to be in practice as quickly as possible. Of course it may be rewarding to have them watching my actions as a teacher as well, to have new eyes looking at my teaching. But if they don’t have any experience of observation or any educational studies, they do not know what to look for. My philosophy is that we share experiences through dialogue. I want to get them “infected”, to understand how fun and inspiring it is to be a music teacher. I investigate what the student teachers’ strengths are and what they think they do not master. That is a balancing act; to see what a human being can handle. “Should I throw

them out into deep water, or should I steer them through in an elegant manner, so that they feel that they handle the situation, even if I have helped them?” I think they learn a lot by being close to the mistake, so they can see where their limits are, but still have the chance to experience the feeling of mastering. My task may also be to play the role of a pupil, to ask questions that make the trainee teachers become really conscious of their actions towards the pupils.

In addition to that, my task is to take care of pre- and post-supervising. I am aware that they have a lot of experience from music teaching, which makes them able to ask critical questions as well. I tell them what is going to happen, what the group of pupils is like, and I also try to choose the groups that I think will suit the student teachers' level. I start the lesson by being a teacher, and then step back and take more or less the role of supervisor, which forces the student teachers to take the teachers' role. I encourage them to own the stage as a performing teacher. It is important to have a chat about what happened directly after the lesson, how they felt, what functioned and what could have been done differently. It is important to be sensitive and careful, especially in the beginning, and to make them aware and able to see their actions and their consequences in a structured way. I use my analytical skills that I myself developed at the conservatoire, to create distance and offer tools for reflection. We also talk a lot about what it is like to be a teacher, which we do as equals. But what I have, which they don't, is the whole picture of what it means to be a music teacher, and it is my task to share that knowledge. It is also important to connect the instructions from the conservatoire to each lesson. In the end my task is to evaluate if they will pass or not.

The task of the student teacher is to be prepared and involved in the content in advance, which is a prerequisite for good and meaningful pre- and post-supervising.” I try to guide them in the current moment. They are in a specific place, they have been in a place, and they are directed towards a place. That is three places at the same time. I try to encourage them to be where they are and use their experience.” And then their task is to figure out the smart things themselves.

The student teachers can and also do use one another in the learning processes. They can encourage each other in the planning phase, they can use one another as teachers and discussion partners, they can share tasks, observe one another, and function as one another's mirrors.

Functions and goals. The function of practicum is to be an arena for real practising – for doing. Through being in the teaching and learning of music

together with me and the pupils, they get the opportunity to feel what it is all about. It is also very important that they recognise what it means to teach music as a whole, to be a part of the whole setting, including the organization, all the professional tasks and communities. It is here they understand what they are educated for, and that's why it is important that they get the chance to try teaching themselves as fast as possible.

Practicum is a place where the student teachers should learn to organize music teaching, through participating at a suitable level. It may be about how to get attention, and how to adapt their musical knowledge to the level of the pupils they meet, to different stages in school – to use their knowledge as a school subject in a teaching situation. They must have an opportunity to try different aspects of teaching and different content in a safe milieu, where they gradually learn to relate to and adapt to different kinds of frameworks, such as time, syllables, semester plans, school codes and group constellations.

One goal is also that they learn to be aware of themselves, their reactions, and their musical and educational choices, to reflect upon what they say and what they do, in what way and why, in the teaching situation. Therefore continual reflecting chats and discussions between co-students and supervisors should be a part of practicum.

Frustrations. My frustrations concern that I do not always have time or conditions for good conversations before and after the student teachers' teaching sessions. It is frustrating not to have the chance to get deeply involved in the student teachers' teaching plans in advance. The other way round it is also frustrating not to have time to tell the trainee teachers about the pupils they are going to meet, or how the activities are organized and why. We should in addition to that be more aware when we observe the student teachers; we have to develop our observation abilities to be able to give really good response.

It is also hard to succeed in meeting the different student teachers where they are. Some have to be tightened up, and others have to be pushed forward. (I have a feeling that practicum is organised based on a master - apprentice way of thinking, and that influence the preconditions for what is possible to do.) There is one aspect connected to organisation that frustrates me; the trainee teachers have very small "holes" in their schedules where they have time for doing music teacher education, and of course that influences the quality in several ways. I have done my bit to organize time for the teaching, but that is not enough.

Also frustrating is the relation between practicum and the subject of *didaktik* at the conservatoire. There is a great gap between us and I am afraid that the student teachers don't assimilate some parts of what they should learn. We don't know each other's practices, and too seldom does anyone from the conservatoire come and visit us. There are no goals from the conservatoire concerning what they are supposed to learn from being here in practicum; there are some instructions for what they are to do, but no goals for what to learn. It is hard to assess when you do not know what to assess; I do not really know what is expected of me, and on top of it all there is so little time the student teachers spend with me.

Discussion

Two common main issues have become obvious in the material, namely a desire for long, continuous and varied occasions for practicum within music teacher education, together with clear goals and frameworks for the activities. The issues are also connected to functional relations between the conservatoires, not least the *didaktik* courses, and the practicum arenas. These demands create new questions. What are the goals for the practicum? What should be learnt in what ways on these occasions? On an overarching level the trainee teachers are supposed to learn how to teach music and function in a profession as a music teacher. The question is what competences they need to be able to do that, and the next question is which of these competences are most relevant and important in order to get the chance to develop in the field of practicum. The following question, which is the most relevant to this paper, is: What is the role of the supervisor, or in other words, what kind of supervisor do we need? We have to discuss what competences supervisors need, and how these competences can be used in the best ways in relation to trainee teachers' learning of how to teach. What models for supervision should be taken up and used as examples? Sharing of responsibility is viewed differently by the two kinds of supervisors. What is relevant, what is good? The issue has to be discussed, as all trainee teachers are expected to manage to teach themselves after they have finished their teacher education. Maybe we need both mastering gurus and mentoring critical friends, or supervisors who can choose between the roles depending on the situation.

It could be interesting to go further into what ideologies that lie behind and steer the different approaches and kinds of commitment of the different kinds of supervisors. This would not least be useful, as research

has proved that the student teachers adapt supervisors' approaches and philosophies (Kettle & Sellars, 1996). In the result there is a loss when it comes to what Franke & Dahlgren (1996) call principle-oriented supervising, in other words reflections upon why and how the student teachers act as they do in teaching. How can student teachers' views of learning and musical knowledge become the focus in practicum? And how can the discussions become more concept-based? The mentoring critical friends are much more into reflection than the mastering guru, but the reflection mentioned by them may also be said to be episode-oriented. It is relevant to ask what supervisors need to be able to manage supervising which is oriented towards episodes as well as principles.

It has been stated through out this paper that sharing of experiences can take place and lead to professional competence in different ways. It is important that the ways experiences are shared should be consciously dealt with and reflected in music teacher education of good quality.

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