

# Genres, values, and music pedagogy students identity formation as music teachers *in spe*

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## Introduction

In several publications, Geir Johansen has addressed the relation between identity formation among music pedagogy students studying to become music teachers (Johansen, 2008) and learning processes in the subject *Musikdidaktik* (Ferm & Johansen, 2008). This subject 'is a core subject within music teacher education in several European and Scandinavian countries, comprising the theory of music teaching and suggesting structures and principles for its planning and analysis' (ibid.: 178).<sup>1</sup> As such, the study of the identity formation in connection with *Musikdidaktik* is highly relevant as we can assume the subject course to be a central location for processes that lead to such identity formation. Ferm and Johansen (2008) found that deep learning (as opposed to surface and superficial learning) in *Musikdidaktik* is enhanced if students have developed an identity as music teachers. Furthermore, students often have even stronger learning experiences if their identities as performing musicians are developed in parallel and blended with their teacher identities.

In this essay, I want to highlight dimensions of identity formation as instrumental teachers among music pedagogy students from the perspective of musical genres, understood as musical cultures. Further, I will discuss how cultural value systems in respective genres afford different kinds of *musical* learning and potentials for performer identity formation, and different kinds of *didactical* learning and thus potentials for teacher identity formation. The overall aim with this review is to

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1 The authors use the Swedish term and spelling instead of the English direct translation *music didactics*. The Swedish spelling is close to its German origin *Musikdidaktik*, and has semantic connotation and reference to analytic theories of teaching. The English *didactic(s)* has a normative and often negative connotation, referring to an authoritarian, blackboard-, teacher- and transmission-oriented way of teaching.

contribute to the discussion of content in the subject *Musikdidaktik* (Ferm & Johansen, 2008) when taking genre, cultural values and performer/teacher identities into account. As a point of departure, I will present a narrative from my own teaching practice as jazz vocal teacher.

### A narrative about Louise

A few years ago, I got a phone call from a very upset student of mine, in the need of an emergent advice. The 'student', whom I here call Louise, was herself a vocal teacher in a music programme in Upper Secondary School. Louise was in her early sixties, a classical singer who had decided that she in her final years as a vocal teacher should do an effort to meet the wishes from her students regarding choice of genre. Since many of her students wanted to sing jazz, she felt she had to learn more about this music in order to teach it in an ethical responsible way. Although Louise enjoyably had listened to a lot of vocal jazz over the years, she thought of *performing it* as something in a black box. She had no idea of how to approach it, how much of her operatic voice she would be allowed to use, how much of the musical structure of a jazz standard she was supposed to understand before trying to sing it, nor in what ways such knowledge was expected to be expressed musically. In other words, she didn't know what counted as a good vocal jazz performance and what did not, that is, what musical values that underpinned vocal jazz.

Her strategy was as serious as it was brave. In order to get to grips with these questions, she decided to become a student herself. Over a period of four years, she took occasional lessons from me in jazz vocals. We used standards as a point of departure, and worked with quitting habits like ending all the phrases with long vibrato notes, improvising rhythmic and melodic variations of the original melody by starting the phrases differently every time and changing the notes, chopping up sentences in the lyrics to create rhythmic and semantic tension, articulating the words with a focus on percussive placement of consonants, and quitting the habit of prioritizing legato and equality of vowels. Typical instructions from me could be: *'Relate to the beat and swing sub-division, not the phrase line, try to avoid stretching the phrase, it places you ahead of the beat. Use your classical voice, it's all the long notes you should get rid of'*. We would practice improvisation over chord changes: *'You don't have to know the chords, follow your intuitive inner ear, and listen to my piano playing. Don't worry about wrong notes. Focus on rhythmic motives instead, and interact with me. Later we can analyse the chords'*. Louise repeatedly stated that she didn't aspire to

become a ‘proper’ jazz singer. Instead, she wanted to know what tasks and challenges to give her students in the jazz repertoire, and she wanted to be authentic as a teacher in doing so. Here, I use ‘authentic’ in the sense of having gained knowledge of significant musical characteristics of vocal jazz, awareness of the values that underpinned views on what is characteristic and what is not, and ability to make one’s own judgements in accordance with such values.<sup>2</sup> In order to develop this kind of knowledge and awareness, Louise wanted to experience learning tasks herself, from the student perspective. A couple of times she brought her own students to me as well, with herself as an observant, where the three of us would engage in common discussions.

It was immediately after the final exam of one of these students, Louise phoned me, in quite despair. ‘*Do you remember Christine, and her version of Stardust?*’ she said. ‘*Yes, she sang it really well, she had a personal rendition of it*’ I replied. ‘*Yes, I think so too, on her exam performance just now I wanted to give her an A, just for that song. But the examiner wanted to give her a C! Because, as he said, Christine changed the notes in the melody! I haven’t signed the protocol yet, I needed to hear your opinion, maybe I can convince him that he has misunderstood what Christine wanted to do*’. I was, in line with Louise’s reaction, surprised that there actually existed vocal teachers who knew this little about vocal jazz, and who applied the value from classical music not to revolt to the intention of the composer onto the performance of a jazz standard.

I don’t remember if I ever got hold of information about the outcome for Christine. Nevertheless, the reason for introducing my essay with the narrative about Louise is that it illustrates two points that are central to the topic I want to discuss: First, there is Louise’s approach to her own development as a vocal teacher. Her need for authenticity as teacher in a genre she was unfamiliar with, led her to seek experience from the ‘inside’ of the genre. She didn’t think it was enough to attend a single course or listening to a single recording in order to ‘get it’.

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2 Dyndahl and Nielsen (2014) have showed how perceptions of authenticity in various genres may shift over time and from context to context. Dyndahl and Nielsen consider shifting discourses of authenticity to be the results of socio-cultural negotiations of power and identity. Thus, what is considered ‘significant’ in vocal jazz is consequently negotiable. However, it falls outside the scope of this essay to problematize notions of authenticity further, as I am not using the term here for a distinguishing purpose. I use it simply to indicate that in Louise’s perception, there was a difference between being more or less familiar with musical conventions in vocal jazz.

The second point from the narrative is one that underscores the first point by providing contrast. The incident with the examiner who applied musical criteria from one culture to a context where it was not relevant, illustrates that people carry with them cultural values related to genre, these values *do matter* in everyday educational settings, they have concrete consequences for students, and sometimes unnecessary negative.

## Identity formation in socio-cultural thinking

According to Penuel and Wertsch (1995) a sociocultural view on how identity comes to be, takes as a starting point how human intentions and purposes are constantly realized in interaction with others. In such social action the individual is constantly making choices based on for example conviction, ideology, and engagement in a particular vocational pathway. The authors suggest

*that identity be conceived as a form of action that is first and foremost rhetorical, concerned with persuading others (and oneself) about who one is and what one values to meet different purposes: express or create solidarity, opposition, difference, similarity, love, friendship, and so on. It is always addressed to someone, who is situated culturally and historically and who has a particular meaning for individuals (p. 91).*

Identity is thus formed – or *performed* – through rhetorical social action. However, fundamental to Vygotskian theories of development is the interdependence of individual and culture. An important premise here is that learning and development do not follow universal pathways disentangled from context and culture (Rogoff, 1990). Instead, cultural-historical norms and values regulate what are considered to be relevant skills or competencies in a specific context, and thereby ‘constitute local goals of development’ (ibid., 1990: 12).

The social environment or context affords various roles and positions for the subjects that are part of it (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Appropriating certain cultural values and rejecting others are ways of positioning oneself actively within that environment (MacDonald & Wilson, 2006). Choice of a vocational pathway, and commitment to and negotiations of certain value systems and ideologies in a certain career field can be interpreted as a way of constructing identity (Penuel & Wertsch,

1995). Such negotiation is here interpreted as a process of forming and presenting who you are or want to be as a musician (MacDonald & Wilson, 2006), for example related to performing and learning in jazz or Western classical music. The reciprocity between the individual and culture is evident. Cultures are sources for identity formation by affording possible selves. Furthermore, people's expressions of values and standpoints, or their rhetorical actions, can provide important information about features in that social environment, such as jazz or Western classical education, by conveying the kinds of ideologies that are at stake.

As Juliet Hess (2013) writes, a musical culture cannot be understood through stereotyped, context free and essentialized 'snapshots' of a single cultural expression. If we regard genre as a musical culture, Louise was, in my interpretation, searching for the inherent values or conventions in an unfamiliar musical culture, values that guide single performances in situated musical negotiations. Given that culture is 'fluid – ever in motion and never fixed in time and space' (Hess, 2013, p. 86), it follows that getting underneath such sets of conventions means to master them at play in changing performances. Thus, one has to provide oneself with practical experiences with the musical material in culturally authentic contexts (Woody, 2007), repeatedly over time, but in a variety of ways. By 'mastering' underlying values, I mean a degree and a kind of knowing that foster confidence and freedom to take critical stand and make one's own choices, with awareness of rules and thus when one is breaking them. Hence, for Louise, taking jazz vocal lessons at the age of 60 + can be seen as a strategy to uphold her professional ethics and identity as an authentic vocal teacher, that is, being able to teach on a foundation of genre familiarity.

If we see this strategy as rhetorical action, it is clear that as people engage in different social contexts, it follows that identities can shift. Johansen (2008) shows how music pedagogy students' ways of looking at themselves, for example as primarily teacher students or performers students, constantly changed, in some cases back and forth as 'a kind of spiral movement' (ibid.: 60). Previously I noted that deep learning in the subject *Musikdidaktik* was connected to the parallel formation of a teacher identity. Deep learning was enhanced even more if the teacher identity blended with a student's performer identity (Ferm & Johansen, 2008).

However, shifting identities can come into conflict, as when deep learning is achieved in relation to one identity (for example as performer), while what one is learning is conceived as irrelevant in relation to another (for example as teacher) (Johansen, 2008). Johansen (ibid.) partly concludes that

*learning tended to be surface-oriented when students struggled with simultaneous, contradictory (...) identities, and furthermore [that parallel identities] could strongly enhance learning when those identities do not contradict each other (p. 68).*

Turning to the examiner at Christine's exam, we can see his assessment of her performance as rhetorical action that represented his own specific knowledge and cultural judgments of relevant learning goals. His communicated identity stemmed from a different and contradictory kind of value system than that of Christine and Louise, and he was apparently willing to set an example by punishing a 19 year old student for doing what is absolutely appropriate, even expected, on a jazz standard: to improvise. The fact that the improvisational variation of the melody on Stardust according to Louise was done exquisitely and confidently, didn't seem to be included in the examiner's evaluation criteria. Moreover, if it was, the examiner seemed to give priority to manifesting a double hierarchical power relation (double due to the presence of both the composer/performer relation and the examiner/student relation) over musical aesthetics, in the assessment process.

On this background, from the perspective of *Musikdidaktik* as a site where future instrumental and vocal teachers form their teacher identities, and on the premise that such future teachers should have a solid culturally responsive and conscious ethical foundation, it seems crucial to put the question of genre and cultural values under scrutiny.

## **Learning in different genres**

What is it that we learn when we learn a musical genre? The notion of musical genre needs clarification. It is commonly used as a signifier of certain musical features that constitute a (structural) framework that we classify as a particular genre, or to demarcate differences in such features or frameworks. However, as Johansson (2016) points out, genres carry cultural codes that entails not only a particular musical language, but also an 'attitudinal, behavioral and expectational framework' (ibid.: 47). In other words, genre is a term that only makes sense when applied within frames of culture and context. Hence, when one learns music there is a whole system that is learned, not only pieces in a certain repertoire, but ways of performing, abstract theoretical principles, how to listen and appreciate music, a set of attitudes

and kinds of social behavior (Nettl, 2015), and, as stated before, cultural values that permeates these systems.

In ethnomusicology, there is currently a broad consensus that music is a non-universal language, and that both structural and cultural differences between genres are more striking than similarities (Johansson, 2016; Nettl, 2015). Campbell (1997) claims that learning only parts of a genre's multifaceted whole, for example some of the structural characteristics of a musical style, does not necessarily mean that one fully knows the meaning of the music in the same way as performers situated 'within' the culture do.

Further, musical structures and cultural functions of the music are inextricably linked to traditions or methods for learning them (MacGlone & MacDonald, 2017; Schippers, 2010), which can lead us to the assumption that learning practices are as culturally embedded, and culturally different, as the musical content one acquires. For example, orally transmitted music tends to be structured around small, repetitive units (Gravem Johansen, 2005) that are easy to memorize but just as easily can generate long pieces of music with an open form, through repetition and improvisatory jamming (Brinck, 2014). Learning typically happens by direct imitation and repetition (Gravem Johansen, 2005). Within Western classical music on the other hand, composers use the advantage of complex notation and can create complex forms without relying on the performers' memory. Learning to read music is therefore typically regarded a fundamental skill in this genre, and learning *by* reading is often a typical learning activity.

Despite cultural differences, a common feature in almost all musical genres is the fact that musicians *practice*, according to Nettl (2015). However, the *ways* they practice are as different as other cultural features. He argues that by looking at musicians' practicing, in other words 'in what activities they actually engage when they are teaching themselves music' (ibid.: 378), we can learn much about that music's system and values. He provides an illustrative example, by outlining the role of practicing in different Native American music cultures. In some cultures a precise rendering of music was demanded to maintain a ritual function. Here there was a high emphasis on technical proficiency, acquired by explicit and exact repetition, where mistakes were punished. In other Native American cultures more individualized music-making practices could be found, where creation of songs and individual elaborations of existing songs were highly appreciated. Here, less emphasis

was put on practice and perfection, and the practice that was undertaken was more implicit and unconscious.

We can turn Nettl's argument around, and say that in order to understand practicing better, we should also try to understand the music culture – from repertoire and ways of performing to attitudes and social behavior. For example, studies from the UK and Norway (Creech, Papageorgi, Potter, Haddon, Duffy & Morton, 2008; Jørgensen, 1997), respectively, suggest differences between genres in general. Classical music students mostly practice alone, and they often practice for the purpose of the teacher, that is, with an external motivation. Jazz, pop, and folk music students seem to prefer peer learning in social settings, and practicing in bands. The British study further concluded that these students were more intrinsically motivated. Hence, they often practiced less structured, and mostly when they felt like practicing. These differences in practice habits might be seen as sensible and functional if we see them in light of dominant values within those genre domains.

There is a growing interest in genre diversity in music education on various levels, as seen for example in the trend to include world music courses (Hess, 2013) and popular music programs in higher music education (Dyndahl & Nielsen, 2014), and jazz improvisation courses for classical music students, to mention some examples. The question arises whether these tendencies are unproblematic. The view that understanding a music genre presupposes a deep, 'insider's' knowledge, would probably align with the approach Louise, my vocal student, took when wanting to learn to sing jazz. It was exactly the kind of experiences from within the culture (Campbell, 1997), trying to grasp the possibilities for making meaning through musical choices, she wanted to acquire, realizing the effort it would take. However, without such efforts, there is a risk that the intention of diversity and tolerance for different genres in music education result in a superficial attitude towards what there is to learn within various genres, according to Hess (2013). Several questions may then be raised. On whose terms are decisions made about what kinds of experience or knowledge that count as significant? And who will gain from a potentially superficial inclusion, if diversity as such is prioritized over deep knowledge?

If we look for possible reasons for treating 'other' musics (Campbell, 1997) in a superficial manner, one might be that it is easy to perform. A second reason may be that these 'other' musics are treated as exotic, which follows from taking one's own music for granted as the universal norm (Hess, 2013), which is often the case with Western classical music, according to several ethnomusicologists (Hess, 2013;



Kingsbury, 1987; Schippers, 2010). It happens for example when one implicitly refers to Western classical music by using the general notion of 'music' (Schippers, 2010), or when the examiner of Louise's student Christine applied the value of 'singing what is written' from classical singing to Christine's improvised rendition of *Stardust*. A problem with taken-for-granted notions of universal values is that such values are seldom contextualized or problematized (Hess, 2013). Cultural values thus become invisible and therefore hard to question or challenge. Hence, when implicitly claiming universality over others such cultures gain a hegemonic power. The kind of punitive power Christine's examiner performed on her vocal exam is a rather obvious negative example. A more hidden and thus more problematic kind of hegemonic power performance can be related to previously mentioned intentions of being inclusive. Hess (2013) claims that good intentions of genre diversity that stem from a desire of being politically correct, may lead to a trivialization of diversity and difference, 'allowing subjects to perform themselves as "tolerant" and also engage in self-congratulation for said tolerance' (Hess, 2013: 76). Paradoxically, hierarchical power relations are then *reinforced* by rhetorical actions communicated as tolerance in encounters with the 'other' music, to follow Hess' argument.

Values in hegemonic music cultures, performed in music education institutions, can come to represent that institution's hidden curriculum (Johansen, 2008), and afford contradictory identities for students. One example is a study that showed how assessment in a jazz programme rewarded students on the basis of values associated with the classical domain at the expense of values associated with the jazz tradition (Barratt & Moore, 2005), which resembles the examiner's position in the narrative I introduced this essay with. Individual skills and virtuosity were rewarded whereas group creativity was overlooked in the assessment process, simply because individual skills criterion fitted better with the established assessment system in the conservatoire (Barratt & Moore, 2005; Bézenak & Swindells, 2009).

Further, research on instrumental practicing is mainly situated within the Western classical tradition, often framed within the theory of deliberate practice, which has goal-directed learning and effective strategy use as two cornerstones. This theory is sometimes applied to other musical genres, and without awareness of how learning is connected to values, this appliance can lead to biased misconceptions. An second example is a study on different influential factors on talent development (Kamin, Richards & Collins, 2007). The researchers found that professional jazz, pop and folk musicians did not set clear goals for their practicing, nor did they indulge in very structured practice routines. Instead of discussing the relevance of

the chosen learning theory for these genre domains, these findings were ascribed to possible laziness or a lack of knowledge about how to learn, despite the fact that the informants had reached a high level of proficiency as musicians.

## **Genre, values, identities, and consequences for *Musikdidaktik***

In this essay, I have argued that identity is formed in rhetorical actions of communicating who we are based on what we believe and think. Such processes happen as social negotiations within cultural value systems. Vocational choices constitute a major part of identity formation. However, identities can shift according to engagement in different social contexts. For music students studying to be both performers and music teachers, their learning in *Musikdidaktik* is enhanced when their performer *and* teacher identities blend and confirm one another, which can be understood as relating to coherent value systems. However, students' learning is potentially hindered if they are confronted with contradictory value systems. Genre, with its cultural codification, can represent one potential source for identity formation. However, as we have seen, genres also represent potential contradictory value systems. For music students, this is particularly problematic if educational institutions carry unquestioned hegemonic values, where the dominant culture communicates itself as universal and where differences are trivialized, even as a result of intended tolerance.

Is it possible or even desirable to search for a 'common ground' in *Musikdidaktik* across genres given fundamental musical and contextual differences? If we exaggerate a focus on finding commonalities, do we run the risk of reducing important issues to the lowest common denominator, and by doing so, overlooking perhaps tacit musical and contextual features within the genres? And who sets the terms on which eventual commonalities are defined? If the general notion of 'music' masks the fact that 'music' implicitly refers to one specific genre, should the name of the subject change to *Jazz didaktik*, *Classical didaktik*, *Pop didaktik*, et cetera, to avoid the problem? What values would then possibly be lost or overlooked? Or, asking from a different angle, should identified genre-specific cultural features necessarily be regarded as something given and untouchable, not open for change and development?

My argument is that *Musikdidaktik* is a site loaded with tensions regarding its potential affordance for music students' identity formation as instrumental or vocal teachers, and these tensions connect strongly to genre issues. And it is not the case that features of performer identity developed from the student's own learning trajectory, necessarily 'trickle down' onto their teacher identity. Green (2002) notes that popular musicians who learned themselves pop music informally, but had attended classical formal tuition, reproduced 'classical' methods for transmitting knowledge to their own students, even when teaching pop music. Further, a case study (Robinson, 2012) showed that two pop musicians with similar, mainly informal learning trajectories taught their instrumental students differently: 'The ways they *valued the results of their informal learning practices* seemed to determine the extent to which they sought to replicate them in their teaching' (Robinson, 2012: 359. Italics added). In other words, music students from genres 'other-than-classical' will not necessarily be able to draw reflectively and consciously on their respective genre's traditions for learning, if they have appropriated institutional hierarchical values and learned to devalue features of their own tradition. Following the reasoning of Johansen (2008), such a contradiction may even hinder their deep learning in *Musikdidaktik*. Further, if students with a Western classical background are never challenged to contextualise their own genre culture (due to its potential hegemonic invisibility), institutions may deny them of opportunities for critical reflection on their cultural values, which could have strengthened their performance identity and thus, again, foster deep learning in *Musikdidaktik*.

Hess' (2013) approach to a diverse music education is to advocate a decentered, reciprocal and critical music pedagogy. She argues that this critical pedagogy must mean that

*as music educators, we work actively to decenter Western classical music from the central position it has held since the beginning of the history of music education. (...) Part of this decentering process involves debunking the normalization and naturalization of Western classical music through placing it within its context (p. 86).*

I believe that there is much to gain from exchanging knowledge about values, learning, and teaching across genres. Such benefits do not, however, rest in a superficial inclusion or trivialization of differences. Instead, I suggest students must be given opportunities for exploring their own musical identities, negotiated in relation to their respective genre cultures. Then their platform for communicating and reflect-

ing on it to others with diverse frames of experience may become more solid, which in turn may enhance a confident teacher identity along with deep learning in *Musikdidaktik*.

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