

Music teacher identity and professionalism

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Introduction

In Scandinavia, parts of Europe, and North America it has become increasingly common for BAs from various areas (e.g. music teachers) to attend a MA programme in order to acquire research skills – and then apply these skills to their work as practitioners (Jarvis, 1999). This educational trend forms an important way to further professional development in the field of music education.

In several articles, Geir Johansen has discussed aspects of music teachers' professional development and identity formation. Johansen (2010: 149) described his interest as follows:

In what ways can student learning between the institution and pre-service music teacher training be described as connected to identity, and in what ways do these identity-learning relations entail either deep or surface learning?

Johansen refers to two separate inquiries supplementary to each other, one about teaching and learning in 'musikdidaktik' as part of the study programme; and another about supervision and training in pre-service music teacher training. Johansen concludes that it is important to consider

- "Identity formation, maintenance and revision *as* learning.
- Learning as a by-product of identity work, since to learn an identity is to learn what people performing or occupying that identity do.
- Identity formation, maintenance and revision as a prerequisite *for* learning." (Johansen, 2010: 153)

The present article is concerned with transformative learning and identity formation in student music teachers acting as researchers of a music education practice

as part of their MA study programme. More specific, the aim is to discuss how engaging in a research perspective may serve as an eye-opener for student music teachers and widen their perspective on subject didactics, teaching/learning issues and professional practice.

First, concepts and theories framing the following discussion will be outlined. Then follows a discussion of two mandatory courses in the MA programme in music education at *The Danish School of Education, Aarhus University (DPU)* both emphasizing a research perspective on music education.

Concepts and theories framing the discussion

The study programme in music education at DPU very much relies on collaborative activities in a community of academic practice (Wenger, 1998), and this theoretical perspective also provides a common ground for the following discussion of two course modules. Transformative learning and identity formation (Illeris, 2013) frames the discussion of student music teachers' development throughout the study programme and particularly in the course modules in question.

Theoretical models about theory/practice relationships underpinning the article are Erling Lars Dale (1998), Lauvås and Handal (2000), and not least Dietrich Benner's (2010) theory about professional practice that will be explained in some detail.

As it appears in Figure 1, 'Musikdidaktik' and didactology (Nielsen, 2005) form the core of the study programme, yet this will not be unfolded in the present article.

Phenomenology (Zahavi, 2003) forms a general perspective that will be explained particularly in relation to Kirsten Fink-Jensen's teaching strategy, "astonishing practices" (Fink-Jensen, 2012, 2013).

Developing identity as professional music teachers

Students in the study programme, MA in Educational Theory (Music Education) at DPU are accepted on the basis of various BA degrees, e.g. teacher with a specialization in music from a university college, music teacher or musician from a conservatory or BA in musicology from a university (or similar). Those with an artistic or musicological background have very little knowledge of ‘musikdidaktik’ or ‘didactics’ (Nielsen, 2005) and none of the students have previous experience in applying a research perspective. Most of the students, though, have some experience as music teachers either from pre-service teacher training or from their own teaching practice. Student music teachers know the value of being a teacher who incarnates the meaning of the teaching subject (Fibæk Laursen, 2004). “Life and death” in music teaching – and learning – depends on whether the teacher incarnates the meaning of music as an art form.

Many university students – particularly those with a pedagogical or an artistic background – find it challenging to incarnate scientific thinking and identify with a researcher. Students in the study programme at DPU therefore often experience an identity conflict as they enter the university and engage in educational and scientific theory while struggling to maintain a lived relation to their personal musical backgrounds.

Example 1

In a previous investigation (Holgersen, 2006) focus was on student music teachers’ challenges in changing their perspective from practitioners to researchers – or rather to practitioner-researchers (Jarvis, 1999). The object of the investigation was a course in “Pedagogical Research”. In this course students should apply a research perspective through case-writing on a chosen pedagogical problem. Case-writing as a method of teaching-and-learning formed part of several courses in the MA programme, and in “Pedagogical Research” it served as a tool to further the students’ thinking as researchers (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond & Shulman, 2002; Holgersen & Burnard, 2013). The change of perspective may be illustrated by pointing out different kinds of knowledge that inform teaching and research, respectively (Figure 1):

	Teachers' perspective	Researchers' perspective
Meta theory	Pedagogical philosophy, didactology	Philosophy and theory of science
Theory / method / methodology	Subject matter didactics and teaching methods	Research methods and methodology
Practice	Teaching practice	Research practice

Figure 1: different kinds of knowledge informing teaching and research.

The three levels illustrated in Figure 1 form the theoretical basis of several models on theory/practice relations and with different implications for pedagogy (e.g. Dale, 1998; Lauvås & Handal, 2000). The juxtaposition of teaching and research, then, implicate that the development of pedagogical professionalism is not only a matter of involving vertical levels of thinking but also rely on a change of position as teacher and researcher, respectively. Engaging in both kinds of practices enables the teacher to establish an insider's as well as an outsider's view on practice. This in turn may help the (student) music teacher be the chief revisionist of her own individual conceptions (Individualkonzepte) of music teaching and learning (Niessen, 2008).

The value of including different kinds of knowledge related to teacher and researcher positions is emphasized in Dietrich Benner's definition of 'professional practice'. According to Benner (2010), professional knowledge and practice is required when everyday knowledge and practice is no longer sufficient to deal with the increasing complexity of problems in (music) education. Professional knowledge draws on scientific theory, whereas everyday knowledge does not. Professional practice, however, depends on both everyday experience and scientific knowledge. To illustrate this relationship, in Figure 2, professional practice is placed between everyday practice and scientific practice, and the challenge for teacher education is to prepare the future professional teacher to integrate these different areas of knowledge. (Holgersen & Holst, 2013).

Scientific practice and scientific knowledge
Professional practice and professional knowledge
Everyday practice and experience

Figure 2: Three different practices drawing on different kinds of knowledge

Through the case-writing exercise, the students negotiated different implications of professional knowledge and practice as a preparation for their final reports.

Evaluation of the students' written exercises and final reports (Holgerson, 2006) indicated that

- Most students enter the course having a practitioner's identity, but participating in course activities and engaging in the community of scientific practice (Wenger, 1998), they try to identify with a researcher's position.
- Students who establish relations between exercises and final reports as preparation for their MA thesis experience deep learning – and some of those who do not experience deep learning happen to fail at the examination.
- Many students claim that scientific knowledge would have increased their learning outcome of courses prior to "Pedagogical Research".

Apparently, the training of student music teachers' ability to include both a practice and a research perspective promote transformative learning and development of a professional identity as music teachers.

Example 2

Kirsten Fink-Jensen (2012; 2013) developed the course "Music education problems in music education practices" (hereafter "Music education problems") and the author of this article has collaborated on and continued teaching the course. The course includes an exercise called "astonishing practices" drawing on the anthropological concept of astonishment. The students participating in this course already have completed the following courses: General didactics, subject didactics, psychology in music education and "Pedagogical Research". Fink-Jensen (2013: 140) explains the aim of "Music Education Problems" in this way:

But the ability to respond in a professional way in specific situations calls for both professional knowledge and a capacity to be present in an open, sensuous way. So, even though the teaching strategy of 'astonishing practices' encompasses introductions to pedagogical and psychological theories, the central point of departure is a problem that has turned up in a specific practical situation. What does the student see? Does she wonder why something happens? To stress this part of the strategy, I introduce the concept of 'aston-

ishment', inspired by anthropological research. The consequence is that the students have to be participant observers in the selected situation of music education.

As participant observers the student music teachers have to abandon normative thinking in order not to jump into conclusions about the observed situation. Instead of evaluating a music education practice in terms of failure or success, the students are encouraged to "see" what actually happens.

A phenomenological framework applies, which is characterized by the first person perspective and an open approach to lived experiences (Zahavi, 2003). Three phenomenological techniques or attitudes form the backbone of the procedures in the exercise "astonishing practices": Epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation.

Epoché means to establish an open approach to a pedagogical situation abandoning the 'natural attitude', which means that everyday understandings as well as theoretically biased knowledge about music teaching and learning should be "put into brackets" (Zahavi, 2003). As the participant observer practice the epoché, a music teaching-learning situation becomes meaningful as it appears to the observer, i.e. prior to linguistic description and not rooted in didactic or psychological knowledge or presumption. Doing participant observation therefore implicates a respectful distance. The keyword is 'openness', and the pitfall is that it is very tempting to apply one's "individual conceptions" (Niessen, 2008) or even normative views.

Phenomenological reduction means to make sense of the ways in which the music education practice becomes meaningful to the participants, i.e. to be sensitive to the intersubjective meaning of articulations, interactions, and communication between participants (including the teacher). Description in everyday language is necessary to capture the meaning for later analysis and the pitfall is that theoretical concepts tend to offer explanations that hamper the descriptive purpose.

Imaginative variation may be compared to a peculiar kind of concept analysis, where the participant observer tries to imagine a variety of potential meanings of the observed phenomenon in a musical practice. Habitual thinking seems to be the most obvious obstacle for students to imagine different and perhaps unexpected interpretations of pedagogical situations. This attitude, therefore, relies on sensitivity to theoretical as well as practical implications.

As it appears, “astonishing practises” is at the same time a teaching strategy and a research approach in the form of a case study. The student music teachers go through several steps to produce empirical material, only for the purpose of pedagogical reflection.

A special feature of the case study is that the students collect and review empirical material (video takes, field notes, stimulated recall interview) in order to focus on their own astonishment. Only after having described what is profoundly astonishing, is it considered legitimate to formulate a music educational problem, i.e. in a generalized form avoiding a normative bias.

The student music teachers have to consider at least two questions: What is a (legitimate) problem in music education? And which music education theories would be suitable for analysing this problem? In consequence, the analysis may even be open ended. The course design in “Music Education Problems” promotes the students’ appreciation of triangulation on several levels – different subjective perspectives, methodological approaches, and theoretical perspectives – when they engage in analysing the problem.

Sticking to anthropologically inspired metaphors, the course, “Music Education Problems”, takes the form of a journey into a music education practice and back to the university where fellow students and teacher engage in mutual reflections. It seems reasonable to see this journey as a transformative learning process through which the students may experience what it is like to incarnate a professional teacher identity.

Students experience that it is their own responsibility to arrive at a legitimate music education problem, although a lot of considerations take place during group work and in the classroom.

Conclusions

As Ramsden (2003: 11) explains, “Changing students’ approaches to the subject matter they learn is the key to improving their learning: in turn, the key to improving teaching is changing the way in which the process is understood by its practitioners.”

This is not only a question of technical competences (referring to the Aristotelian concept 'techne'), rather university students and teachers inevitably involve their life worlds as they engage in this particular community of academic practice called music teacher education. The aim of the reflective educational practices discussed in this article is to promote deep learning rather than surface learning and thus to contribute to student music teachers' development of a professional identity as music teachers.

In the case of Pedagogical Research and Developmental work, discussing examples of case studies in music education student music teachers obtain a preliminary understanding of the value of research for music education practice. Research based and practical knowledge must be integrated in order to develop professionalism (Holgersen & Burnard, 2013).

In the case of "Music Education Problems", the student music teachers experience difficulties and values in engaging in a case study using a first person perspective and then choosing suitable music education theory for the analysis of a music education practice. "Music Education Problems" "provides an opportunity for students to *see* (i.e. to with an open mind) and deal with problems in music education." (Fink-Jensen, 2013: 153). Following the strategy the students obtain hands-on knowledge of how to integrate music education theory and practice.

In conclusion, I share the idea that student music teachers' identity formation relies on learning and at the same time identity formation is a prerequisite for learning (Johansen, 2010: 153). In the present article, I have argued that applying a research perspective to music didactic reflection can support deep learning in music education theory as well as the formation of a professional identity in student music teachers drawing on scientific as well as practical knowledge.

Developing a professional identity, therefore, does not mean to abandon a previous identity nor to imitate the identity of a professional teacher. Rather student music teachers learn to act and reflect as professionals though integrating the teacher-researcher perspective into their identity.

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