

Chapter 9

Student Music Teachers' Learning and its Relations to Identity

Between the Academy and the Pre-service Music Teacher Training Field¹

GEIR JOHANSEN

The increased attention towards educational quality in higher education is a global phenomenon. Quality agencies exist in almost every country and evaluations, subject assessments and audits proliferate. Among the concerns of such agencies is to analyse the quality of teaching and learning. This presentation focuses on institutions for higher music education, and the quality of teaching and learning going on within them.

One concern which has frequently been addressed as a major challenge for the development of music teacher competence is the relationship between what students learn at the institution and their learning during their school based, pre-service music teacher training. In two studies Cecilia Ferm-Thorgersen and I have asked if the various ways students see themselves at their institution and in their pre-service training have something to do with their learning. This paper concerns whether and to what extent

¹ Originally published in Holgersen, S. E. & Nielsen, F. V., Eds. (2010). *RAIME – Research Alliance of Institutions for Music Education. Proceedings of the Tenth International Symposium*, pp. 149–156. Reprinted with permission.

student learning is related to connections *between* these two fields, and how various ways of seeing oneself – questions of identity – may affect their learning. Hence, the central question here is:

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?

Two Studies

Tentative answers can be extracted from two studies, one about the quality of teaching and learning in a subject inside the institution, *musikdidaktik* (Ferm, 2008; Ferm & Johansen, 2008; Johansen & Ferm, 2007; Johansen, 2009a; 2008); and another about the quality of supervising and training in the pre-service music teacher training field (Johansen, 2009b).

Theoretical foundations

Wenger (1998; 2006) is one of the scholars who focussed on the connections between identity and learning. By bringing learning theory and social theory together, and in combination with elements from other theories (2006, p.26), both studies drew on a combination of theoretical positions, as described by Fornäs' (1995, p.12) in his concept of "Theoretical Bricollage". As such the theoretical grounds of the two studies in question can be comprehended as a *late modern* theoretical position.

Identity was studied from the perspective of late modern, contemporary culture and society (Giddens, 1990; 1991; Hall, 1992; Gee, 2001; Johansen, 2009a; forthcoming). This perspective suggests that various notions of identity – from identity as a permanent core, to identity as performative and dynamic – exist side by side among student music teachers.

Student learning was studied by drawing on the pedagogy of higher education, and within this, notions of 'students' deep and surface oriented learning' as understood by the 'Approaches to Learning' (S.A.L.) literature (Pettersen, 2004; Richardson, 2000; Johansen, 2007). This literature understands students' *learning orientations*, as being constituted by their *learning styles*, *learning strategies*, and *learning approaches*, the latter including both intention as well as motivation. Surface learning entails strategies for memorising and reproducing knowledge in connection with

intentions to pass tests and examinations, which is often linked to negative attitudes to learning in general. Deep learning denotes strategies for meaningful learning, so as to understand the potential in what is learned for its further utilization in teaching practices, as well as when communicating with peers and professors. It is connected with intentions to gain thorough insights, and a positive attitude to learning in general.

Wenger's theory of communities of practice and learning systems (1998; 2006) is a useful ground for looking at students' learning as a relational product of the academy and school based pre-service music teacher training. The most fundamental influence of Wenger in this respect was his notion of learning systems and learning trajectories, which laid the ground for studying learning in terms of relationships *between* the institution and pre-service training (Ferm Thorgersen & Johansen, 2009), including students' movements (literally) back and forth between them. I will focus here on some preliminary identity-learning relations that can be discussed in general, without drawing extensively on Wenger's theory.

Empirical studies

Within the two studies students and professors as well as trainees and supervisors were interviewed about how they would connect identity and student learning as related to quality. The first study concerned one of the subjects within the institution for higher music education: *musikdidaktik*. *Musikdidaktik* is a central subject in music teacher education in Germany and the Nordic countries. It can be compared to the various subjects within which the theory of music education is studied in other parts of the world. The study included nine student focus groups and 11 professors at institutions in Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway (Ferm, 2008; Ferm & Johansen, 2008; Johansen & Ferm 2007; Johansen, 2008; 2009a).

The second study concerned school based pre-service music teacher training (Johansen, 2009b). It included a smaller sample of three trainee focus groups and eight supervisors. In both studies the interviewees were also asked to consider connections to the other arena.

This text is based on insights drawn from informants' thoughts about *the other arena*, as well as from relating the results of the second study to those of the first with respect to student learning and identity in general.

Findings

By comparing statements from the two studies which concerned the other arena, we deduce that learning goes on whilst the student music teachers move between the institution and the field of pre-service music teacher training. This can happen anywhere – on the bus, in the car etc. – as well as when reflecting on differences and connections between experiences in the two fields.

Learning between the two fields was seen to be related to identity in many ways. Basically, the theoretical, late modern view of identity formation as a continuous, reflexive project (Giddens, 1990; 1991) was confirmed by the interviewees' statements. Firstly, the accumulation of knowledge that grew out of relating the experiences from each field presupposed continuous reflection. Secondly, this continuous reflection on the accumulation of knowledge was reported to be closely related to the student music teachers' self concepts in the two arenas. And thirdly, the actual moves back and forth between the two arenas caused their self concepts to be repeatedly inspected and adjusted.

When we look closer into identity-learning relations, some patterns appear. Learning during pre-service training seems to be affected by the ways in which student music teachers try out or relate to a music teacher identity. It is also affected by the envisaged professional identity (Johansen, 2009a) that the student sees for her or himself in the future. The degree of congruence between envisaged identity and relevant self concept in the pre-service training field affects the intentional as well as the motivational sides of students' learning approaches, and may influence the learning significantly to become deep or surface oriented.

The move back to the institution (still literally as well as metaphorically) involves further perspectives on the dynamics of identity-learning. Several studies have described how musicians'/music teachers' identities challenge the identity formation of music teacher students (Roberts, 1991; Dolloff, 2007; Bouij, 1998; Mark, 1998). Others have addressed the relations between identity and learning in this arena (Ferm & Johansen, 2008; Johansen, 2008; 2009a). From the findings of the latter, it emerged that student music teachers may understand themselves as having a core identity (Hall, 1992) through which all tasks and learning challenges are regarded, or they may feel that changing identity from one subject to another enhances their learning. In both cases the dynamics of identity formation affect the self images which student music teachers bring with them to their training.

Learning *between* the two fields is thus affected by to what degree the students' notions of identity is suited to handling practical teaching tasks with real children and in real time . As a consequence, the choice between maintaining a core identity, or changing between parallel identities, once again comes to the fore.

Hence, in the interplay between experiences within the institution and in training, identity is related to learning in several ways (see also Johansen, forth-coming). Learning *as* identity formation, along with learning *through* an identity, seemed to be the most significant.

Firstly, the processes which student music teachers go through in this respect are characterized by trying out various forms of self expression, or staging, or just adapting 'correctly' to the identities offered by their professors or a peer group, in their attempts to become a group member. In other words, identity formation always involves *learning* an identity.

Secondly, students' identity work at the institution demonstrates a pre-disposition for learning during training and vice versa. Identity work provides lenses through which student music teachers regard the learning tasks and challenges they face in both arenas, or in other words, learning is carried out *through* identity formation.

How then, does this affect the question of deep versus surface student learning? Having interviewed students about their learning orientations, it emerged

that this question is connected to the intentional and motivational sides of students' approaches to learning, which in turn seemed to be influenced by relevant identity-based judgements. How relevant is, say, this particular grade 2 general music teaching challenge for me, when I think of myself as an instrumental student music teacher or as a future teacher in upper secondary school?

Deep versus surface learning is also connected to whether students develop parallel identities, or maintain one and the same "core" identity when responding to the various challenges of the two fields . This affects their self concepts as music teacher students, as well as their envisaged, future identities as music teachers.

Summing up, student music teachers' learning can be understood by reflecting on students' experiences in both fields, as well as their movements between them. Students' experience should be studied further by looking at the following identity-learning constellations:

- 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.

Concluding Remarks

Our approach has one shortcoming. As the professors and students of the first study were not the same people as the supervisors and trainees of the second, this presentation is built on comparisons of statements about common issues, but from two different groups of people. Nonetheless, by drawing on Wenger (1998; 2006), this approach might constitute a first step on the road to mapping student music teachers' identity-learning trajectories (Ferm Thorgeresen & Johansen, 2009). The next step should be to follow a particular cohort of student music teachers in the two fields and in their movements between them. By observing and interviewing just the one cohort of students, attempts can be made to map and describe those trajectories in a more thorough way, which may, in turn, establish a conceptual basis for gathering complementary information by means of a more comprehensive questionnaire survey. This approach can contribute to establishing an empirical basis for further research into educational quality in higher music education.

What remain to be studied and described in greater detail are also identity-learning processes in relation to students' learning capability (Wenger, 2006), and their role as a prerequisite for mediating between structure and agency.

Music students in general establish and maintain membership of various communities of practice inside and outside their institutions for higher music education, whilst moving between them in ways that Wenger (1998; 2006) describes in terms of learning trajectories and learning systems. This in turn leads to a further question: do the results of our study apply to other students and other kinds of relationships and identity work within institutions for higher music education?

References

- Bouij, C. (1998). Swedish music teachers in training and professional life. *International Journal of Music Education*, 32, 24–31.
- Dolloff, L.-A. (2007). It is not what she taught me, it's how she made me feel: The role of emotion in evolving teacher identity. Paper presented at *The Fifth International Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education*. Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, July 2–5 2007.
- Ferm Thorgersen, C. & Johansen, G. (2009). Mapping music teacher trainees' learning trajectories. Presented at *Nordic Network for the Research in Music education* conference, University of Örebro, Sweden, January 21.–23. 2009.
- Ferm, C. (2008). Playing to Teach Music – Embodiment and Identity Making in Musikdidaktik. *Music Education Research* (10) 3, 361–372.
- Ferm, C. & Johansen, G. (2008). Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Educational Quality in Musikdidaktik as related to Preconditions of Deep Learning. *British Journal of Music Education* 25 (2); 177–191.
- Fornäs, J. (1995). *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Gee, J. P. (2001). Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research in Education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25, 99–125.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self Identity. Self and Society in the Late modern Age*, Standford: Stanford University Press.
- Hall, S. (1992). The question of cultural identity. In S. Hall, D. Held & A. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and its futures* (pp. 274–316). Oxford: Polity in association with the Open University.
- Johansen, G. (Forthcoming). Music Education and Sociological Theories of Identity. In Wright, R. (Ed.), *Sociology and Music Education*. London: Ashgate.

- Johansen, G. (2009a). Relations between educational quality in music teacher education and students' perceptions of identity. In F. V. Nielsen, S. G. Nielsen & S. E. Holgersen(Eds.), *Nordic Network for the Research on Music Education, Yearbook 10*. Oslo: Norwegian Academy of Music.
- Johansen, G. (2009b). Relations between identity and educational quality within pre-service music teacher training. Paper presented at *The 6th International Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education*, Limerick, Ireland, 5th–9th July 2009.
- Johansen, G. (2008). Relations between the social development of student identities and the quality of teaching and learning in music teacher education. Proceedings of *Musical Development and Learning. Second European Conference on Developmental Psychology of Music*, 10th–2th September 2008, Roehampton University, London GB.
- Johansen, G. (2007). Educational Quality in Music Teacher Education. Components of a Foundation for Research. *Music Education Research*, 9 (3); 435–448.
- Johansen, G. & Ferm C. (2007). Relations of Quality and Competence. *Finnish Journal of Music Education*. 10 (1–2); 65–81.
- Mark, D. (1998). The Music Teacher's Dilemma: Musician or Teacher? *International Journal of Music Education*, 32; 3–23.
- Pettersen, R. C. (2004). Studenters lærings- og studiestrategier: Kvalitetsindikatorer i høgere utdanning? [Students' strategies of study and learning: Quality indicators in higher education?] *Uniped* 27, 2;44–65
- Ricardson, J. T. E. (2000). *Researching Student Learning*. Buckingham, GB: SRHE & Open University Press.
- Roberts, B. (1991). Music Teacher Education as Identity Construction. *International Journal of Music Education* 18, 3–16.
- Wenger E. (1998). *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2006). *Learning for a small planet*. Project overview. Scientific project description. Retrieved at 13. August 2009 from www.ewenger.com.