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Music Teacher Practice and Identity in Professional Development Partnerships

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School-based collaborations aimed at teacher education and school reform have most often been referred to as *professional development schools*. Calls for this kind of partnership between higher education and public schools first appeared in *Tomorrow's Schools*, a report of the Holmes Group.¹ The promise of the PDS is to move beyond limited interactions between universities and schools focused exclusively on placement of student-teachers, and toward forming inquiry-oriented collaborations where school and university faculty work jointly to improve the education environment for children, pre-service teachers, and themselves.

A typical format for a PDS locates a cohort group of pre-service teachers in schools for approximately two years of their preparation program. They take classes on-site, under the instruction of both school-based and university-based faculty. They also take part in a medical school type rotation, first observing and teaching for a short time in the classrooms of all teachers in a specific grade level or subject area, then remaining in one of those classrooms for an extended internship. In some places this internship lasts for a full academic year. The model functions well for the preparation of elementary teachers and for subject area teachers in language arts, math, social studies and science. It has not been a functional model for the preparation of music teachers because we are unlikely to find more than one full-time music teacher in an elementary school building or more than one choral or instrumental music teacher in a middle school or high school.

Principles have been borrowed from the PDS, however, to form the foundation of professional development partnerships between higher education and public schools for music education. Most important to such partnerships are: a) creating a learning community; b) fostering continuous professional development for novice teachers,

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veteran teachers and teacher educators; and c) site-based, collaborative inquiry into music teaching and learning.² A typical format for this kind of partnership locates a small cohort of pre-service music teachers in a school for two extended periods per week during a 15- week semester, under the guidance of an experienced school music educator and a university music educator. An assumption behind the format is that pre-service teachers' preparation will be based as several professional development sites across several semesters. Thus, professional development partnerships respond to Woodford's call for pre-service teachers to be engaged in "exploring, understanding, and appreciating the multiplicity and complexity of music teacher practice" to develop their identities as music teachers "to the fullest extent possible."³

Storied Identity

Since 1995, I have been the university music educator responsible to a professional development partnership. The partnerships in which I have been involved have been in middle schools or high schools, with grade 6, grade 7, or grade 9 and 10 choirs. Over an 8-year span, I have collected narratives of experience from approximately 100 pre-service music teachers, following, to some extent, the research model of Connelly and Clandinin.

In developing their notion of "personal practical knowledge,"⁴ Connelly and Clandinin discovered that teaching practice questions and teacher identity questions were closely linked. They argue that identity is not a fixed entity, but is "storied."

Identity is a term that tends to carry a burden of hard reality, something like a rock, a forest, an entity. Being true to this identity, be true to oneself, is often thought to be a virtue. Yet, identities...are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds...They may even be, indeed almost certainly are, multiple, depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself...Different facets, different identities, can show up, be reshaped and take on new life in different landscape settings.⁵

In this paper, I will re-present the identity stories of pre-service music teachers as they were shaped by experience inside professional development partnerships. My aim is

to use the stories to illuminate and inform our present understanding of the social construction of music teacher identity, and to suggest how music teacher identities may be shaped differently inside professional development partnerships than they are shaped in traditional music teacher preparation. Obviously, not all of the narratives I have collected can be re-presented here. Methodologically, I have selected stores that exemplify recurring phenomena, but I have refrained from forming composite characters, settings, or plot lines. In all cases, member checks were performed; therefore the pre-service teachers whose stores are told here have had ample opportunity to read draft copies of this research, and to modify their stories as they saw fit. Those pre-service teachers and I made decisions to disguise names and school locations throughout the stories. In selecting and interpreting the stories, I have heeded Britzman's caution that the narrative of lived experience and the lived experience itself "can never be synonymous."

Nor is an identical correspondence a desirable or possible goal. The retelling of another's story is always a partial telling, bound not only by one's perspective, but also by the exigencies of what can and cannot be told. The narratives of lived experience—the story, or what is told, and the discourse, or what it is that structures how a story is told—are always selective, partial, and in tension.⁶



Don't Let Him Get Away with Anything—Brian's Story

According to many of my colleagues, Brian will never win any awards for "student of the year." He's a superb musician and a gregarious individual, but he tries to hold down a church job, perform in the opera, teach voice lessons, wait tables on weekends, and somehow squeeze in being a music education major. Several colleagues, who already had taught Brian in their classes, warned me about his behavior. "Don't let him get away with anything!" was the advice I heard.

I was pleased when the first two weeks of the semester had gone by and Brian had not missed a day at the professional development site. In fact, he hadn't even been late. During the third week of the semester, Brian volunteered to lead the soprano-alto

sectional rehearsal. He remembered to bring his written lesson plan, which he placed on the music stand. But he had memorized the music and he positioned himself away from the music stand and close to the students, listening carefully to their singing. In thirty minutes, Brian went from conductor to coach to cheerleader. The freshmen and sophomore women not only mastered correct pitches and rhythms in this rehearsal, but they also learned to listen for healthy, well-produced tone quality in their singing. They left the rehearsal smiling and obviously proud of their accomplishments. The staff accompanist at the high school remarked afterward, “I had to remind myself that I was not working with a much older teacher.”

Two weeks later, my department chair called me to check on Brian’s progress at the professional development site. He was surprised when I told him that Brian was doing good work, and he informed me that Brian’s voice teacher and I were the only teachers who had not turned in a yellow card—a “Report of Unsatisfactory Progress.” This circumstance led me to interview Brian about how he could be doing so well at the professional development site and so poorly in other classes. This is the story that Brian told:

In Dr. D’s class, we’re writing lesson plans again. We got a template on the first day of class, and it’s the same template he used for his course last spring. In [the spring term course] we wrote probably 15 different lesson plans, and we didn’t get any of them returned to use until the end of the semester. Each of us got to teach only part of one of those plans to our peers....When we finally got placed in schools with real students, there was absolutely no connection between those lesson plans we had written and what the kids and their teachers were doing.

In Dr. T’s class, we learn to teach songs by rote, using a call and response technique. We also learn to teach pitch and rhythm patterns using basically the same techniques. Once you’ve got the technique down, there really isn’t much else to learn. I suppose the course is a little more difficult for people who used numbers instead of solfege in their freshman and sophomore theory classes. They probably need more practice.... At least in Dr. T’s class we learn repertoire that we might use again on other occasions, and there are lots of opportunities for peer teaching. But what really annoys me about the class is that everything is based on her assumption that all children learn music in just

one way. She arranges for us to observe in schools, but when we go out, all we really can written in our observation notebooks is, 'They're not using the method we learned in class and wouldn't it be nice if they did.' It makes me wonder if she observes the same students we observe. If she does, how can she believe that all children everywhere are the same? And does she really believe that they go to music classes but don't learn music?

So, when I'm trying to do so much—my jobs, the opera, and my studies—and I hear my alarm and think whether I would rather go to those classes or sleep, well, you know I often choose to sleep.... Why do I always go to the professional development site? Because it's what I've always wanted to do, and it's the very thing that has been missing from the rest of my education. At the professional development site, I'm treated like a music teacher. I'm not perfect at it, but every time we're there, I feel like I'm improving.

Short of condoning Brian's choices, we may find his story useful for what it reveals about the ways in which identity and practice are traditionally shaped in music teacher education programs. At their worst, traditional programs may prevent students from imagining themselves as teachers. Students who are awarded with good grades when they attend class regularly and submit well-written lesson plans that conform to the rules of English grammar may not wholly differentiate methods classes from general studies or humanities classes. Little of the content or format of those methods classes bears directly on becoming a teacher, and much of it is aimed at reminding the student that he is, after all, a student. Where a student resists the ways in which teacher knowledge is structured in methods classes such as these, my colleagues' admonition, "Don't let him get away with anything," alludes to the consequence. Teachers will do what they can to keep the student in his place.

Another version of traditional music teacher preparation shapes the teacher's identity through insistence on a narrow teaching method. This kind of teacher preparation rests on assumptions that one child is interchangeable with the next, and that context for teaching is irrelevant to the set of transportable facts and concepts the constitute the method. All that is necessary is to coax teachers to make it to page 46 of the basal series text by the end of November, or use moveable-do solfege rather than numbers, or substitute a good breath and preparation gesture for '1-2-ready-go.' Music teaching

practices, in this version of teacher preparation, are meant to be absorbed passively, committed to memory as a set of abstract rules, and then applied later in field experiences and internships. Frequently, the anonymous authority of a methods textbook legitimates the music teaching practices. If a pre-service teacher experiences discontinuity and confusion between the abstracted teaching practices he memorized for use in the college classroom and the everyday practices he is observing in the field, he has only himself to blame for failing to develop ‘properly’ as a music teacher.

Lauren’s Epiphany

From the time of her admissions interview when she was a senior in high school, Lauren made it clear that she was preparing for a career in law. Yet, the extraordinarily high quality of her singing performance and leadership experience made Lauren a desirable candidate for the school of music, and she enrolled as a music education major. Each winter, when most music education majors asked faculty to write recommendations for summer internships in orchestras, opera companies, or music camps, Lauren asked her teachers to write a recommendation for an internship at a prestigious Washington, DC law firm. And so it went: every summer Lauren would devote all her energies to law, and during the academic year, she would pass her time in the music education program.

In her junior year, Lauren was placed with a cohort group at the professional development site located at Cooper Middle School. The first journal entry she posted that semester read:

Wow! This isn’t like any middle school chorus I remember. Here, Julie [the school-based collaborating teacher] and the kids are constantly in motion. She prepares so thoroughly, both for the short-term and the long-term that these kids can have no fear of failure. They trust Julie, they adore her, and they believe they are good musicians because of her Incredible! What I remember from middle school are the nuns saying ‘you can’t do this’ and ‘don’t do that,’ inefficiency and constant complaining. I had the opposite experience that these kids are having.

By midterm, Lauren and her cohort group had already taken part in one school-wide choral concert, where they met the parents of many of the 7th grade students with whom they were working. They were also busily preparing ‘Music-in-our-Schools Month’ performances and getting a few students ready for state solo festival. All the members of the cohort group were spending more time at the professional development site than was required of them. In her mid-term interview Lauren said:

It is such a difference from last semester when I was alone in a field placement. It helps to see other people teach, and then talk together. In other classes, we’ve focused on the ‘what’ issues—what song material is appropriate for 3rd graders or what kind of lesson plan should you write—and after I’ve expressed my views, I’ve often been attacked by or condescended to by my peers. Here at Cooper we ask, ‘Why did you choose that warm-up for this group today? Why did you decide to abandon your lesson plan? Why did you call on Natalie instead of Theresa?’ and we sit at various places in the room so each of us has a—literally—different perspective on the sound of the choir and the group dynamics. We realize there’s never one right answer to the ‘why’ questions, and we’re committed to comparing our various perspectives. As a result, there’s a level of trust that has built between us, and that trust creates more dialogue, and the dialogue creates more trust. I think that’s one of the things causing us to practically move in out here. We want to be together.


The university’s semester ended on May 1st, but Lauren and several other members of the cohort group begged for permission to stay on at Cooper and help Julie with a composition project, fourth quarter testing, and the May concert. When Julie’s principal agreed, Lauren told him:

You and Julie have made such an effort to make us feel welcome here. We feel like the 7th grade chorus—in fact, the whole school—is ours.

Later, Lauren commented:

Up ‘til now, the thing that’s been driving me away from teaching is the colleagues I thought I would have—the colleagues who didn’t prepare for class, the colleagues who would complain, the colleagues who would never give their best to kids. It has not been that way here. Here I’ve seen teachers, especially Julie, pay attention to kids, and respond to them as individuals. And in being in

this environment, a huge new self-confidence has emerged for me. Now I know I can do this [choral music teaching], and in the right place, I could love it.



Lauren's story first of all confirms that the twelve or more years of schooling prior to college is a powerful "apprenticeship of observation,"⁷ shaping expectations of teaching, teaching practices, and ultimately, teacher identity. Her story also reveals that work in the professional development partnership can interrupt and complicate whatever images of teaching the pre-service teacher holds. In this regard, the most significant character in Lauren's story is Julie, the 7th grade chorus teacher at Cooper Middle School. In traditional teacher preparation programs, pre-service teachers do indeed make observations of teachers in the field, but what is shown to them is the endgame, the pedagogical encounter as a product or performance. The collaborative ethic of a professional development partnership means that pre-service teachers not only are shown, but are allowed to experience the pedagogical encounter in all of its manifestations: as preparation, as performance, and as transaction in the out-of-classroom environment. As a result, they come to know intimately the experienced teacher's habits of mind, her reflections on teaching, and the values that structure her practices.

Lauren's story also highlights the significance of membership in the cohort group in shaping teacher identity. Immersed in a specific context while learning to teach, the members of Lauren's cohort group enter a sustained conversation. In that conversation, each member of the cohort is free to question, justify, and try to reconcile beliefs about teaching with teaching practices. Lauren refers to this process as focusing on the 'why' questions, and as she implies in her story, the conversation with peers leads her to construct images of music teaching that are complex, contingent, and flexible rather than certain and predictable.

Hearing one another and being heard in the process of learning to teach is perhaps the most significant aspect of membership in the cohort group, especially relative to the institutional structures of university and school that have typically isolated and silenced teachers. Richert argues that "Being heard as a description of teachers'

experience...represents a relatively revolutionary position rather than a position that is normative in the profession.” She goes on to suggest that

As [pre-service] teachers talk about their work and ‘name’ their experiences, they learn about what they believe. They also learn what they do not know. Such knowledge empowers the individual by providing a source for action that is generated from within rather than imposed from without.⁸



Revising Rachel

Rachel describes herself as a quiet and ‘no nonsense’ student. Interestingly, the university music faculty use similar terms to describe her: serious, quiet, conservative, academically capable, and never disruptive. At the middle school professional development site, however, Rachel showed a different facet of herself. It first emerged in her journal writing, about three weeks into the semester:

My teacher dynamic with Natalie was different than I had anticipated. These girls remind me so much of my little sister, Emily. I would never put myself in a position with Emily to be authoritarian—to impose my will on hers. Rather, I’m more often in the position of just being an older role model. I’m finding that these ‘sisterly’ feelings are coming through in teaching, especially in preparing the girls for solo festival. I would much rather that these girls thought of me as a learner, just as they are, although I am older and perhaps more experienced. A few weeks later, Rachel wrote about teaching sight singing: I’m committed to this literacy business; to tell the truth, I’m more passionate about it than most other aspects of music teaching. I know that developing literacy is essential if we anticipate that students will participate in musical activities after they graduate from high school. If they can read music and perform without help, more possibilities will be open to them in their communities. They will have the information they need to make good musical decisions for themselves....Before now, I was also passionately committed to THE way to teach music literacy. Now, as I work with these girls, I’m realizing that what works with one doesn’t work at all with the next. Natalie, for example, can see and understand pitch contour, she knows the basics of solfege, and she says she doesn’t understand why her friends don’t ‘get it’ when it comes to sight

singing. Heather, on the other hand, has no system that works for her. She has a strong sense of 'home,' though, and is starting to see the difference between skips and steps. The surprising thing about Heather is that she can hear a piece of music once and have it memorized. I'm starting to ask, 'what's so wrong with that?' Doesn't it achieve the same goals?

About the mid-point of the semester, Rachel was conducting the 7th grade choir rehearsal, and her plan was to get some input on interpretation issues from the students. Stacy, a student with developmental delays, was one of the students Rachel called on for her input. Stacy's response seemed less focused than those of her peers of similar chronological age, and several students, especially the boys, began to giggle. In a split-second decision, Rachel chose to ignore their giggling and move on with the rehearsal. Later during the debriefing time, she was angry with herself for making that choice:

Julie has done a really remarkable job in this school of making it known that ALL students are eligible for chorus, and her colleagues have obviously believed her, because look how many special education kids are enrolled in the program! This was not my experience when I was in middle school or high school, and I suppose I should just be thankful to be working in a place where things are different. But if we're going to practice inclusion, then all students have to have a voice. No child can be marginalized. Who are any of us to say that Stacy's responses today were inappropriate or immature, or, worse yet, wrong? I should have stood up for Stacy—why was it so easy to be silent?

In her final interview with me, Rachel summed up her semester at the professional development site:

You asked us constantly to question our assumptions and our values. I took you seriously, and it has paid off tremendously: I've never been more aware of myself as a teacher. I've discovered that I have an affinity for these kids—it's thrilling to me when they create something that's SO musical! Most importantly, I've learned that, although I can function in this school environment, I'm not really comfortable in it. In a public school, teachers seem to be governed by the clock and by a curriculum that's imposed upon them from some administrator or from the state. They also seem overwhelmed at meeting the individual needs of thirty, sixty, or a hundred kids in the same class. I would like to be in a place where, if a student needs help on sight singing, I could get

her whatever help she needs, or if a student wants to explore composition, I could be flexible and help him do that. I would like to be in a place where everyone is included in the music program, where everyone has a voice, and where everyone is a learner—even the people who name themselves ‘teacher.’

Our greatest apprehension about professional development partnerships ought to be that they would become the very kind of teacher preparation programs they are intended to reform. The potential is there: the university faculty member could impose his will on the school faculty member, and with this inequitable relationship, the school faculty member’s role could be reduced to “high level clerk or specialized technician.”⁹ The specialized techniques of the experienced faculty member could then become the inherited script by which the pre-service teachers learn to live. Rachel’s story should give us hope that these fears will not be realized.

Implied in her story is Rachel’s description of herself as ‘music teacher’ prior to her work in the professional development partnership. Yet, her experiences in the partnership revise this description; there is change and growth in Rachel’s teacher identity. Taylor argues that this kind of growth can only take place in “a moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance...and what is trivial and secondary.”¹⁰ In her work at the professional development site, Rachel is free to question her own assumptions about music teaching as well as those assumptions that structure the experienced teacher’s practices. She is free to import her own meaning into what she sees and experiences, rather than reliant on some outside authority. Claiming this moral agency, Rachel is free to transgress what is and evoke what might be.

Implications

When can we say that our professional identities have been constructed? Is it when we can finally name ourselves ‘teacher,’ like Lauren? Is it when we show awareness of and resistances to those forces that keep us from becoming teachers, like Brian? Or is it when we become theorist-practitioners, like Rachel, believing in and acting upon a more

expansive vision of teaching? Returning to the initial premises that identity is storied and that different facets of identity show up in various landscape settings, the answer, of course, is “all of the above.”

In traditional music teacher preparation, where schoolchildren are often nameless, faceless abstractions and where the facts and concepts that comprise the music curriculum are immutable, there is also only one music teacher identity story that can be told. The power of the professional development partnership, at least in regard to the preparation of new music teachers, lies in its encouragement of plurality and malleability. To be sure, identity stories that arise in professional development partnerships are many and frequently modified. Critical to their shaping and reshaping are not only the observations of teaching and acquisition of experience in an authentic school context, but also the interpretation of observations and experience. Since interpretation takes place mainly through dialogue, in the conversations of the cohort group, those interpretations of teaching experience are also multiple and subject to change.

In her article, “Teaching as Research,” Duckworth maintains that to learn, students must engage in or with a phenomenon and then try to explain and make sense of that phenomenon.¹¹ Though Duckworth’s description is of a group of teachers as they observe the moon and then try to make sense of those observations, it might well be a description of Brian, Lauren, and Rachel as they engage with the phenomenon of music teaching, and then try to make sense not only of teaching, but of themselves as teachers. Duckworth considers that the teacher’s role, in this model of learning, is to introduce students to phenomena they may not otherwise encounter, and to encourage a sense of wonder about the phenomenon. Duckworth’s argument sheds light on how pre-service teachers’ identity stories are shaped in yet one more way inside professional development partnerships: that is by the experienced school and university music educators who introduce the pre-service teachers to music teaching in ways that make it seem like unfamiliar territory, in ways that make it, in Duckworth’s word, “wonderful.” This leaves open the intriguing possibility that pre-service teachers are not the only ones

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whose identities are reshaped inside professional development partnerships. As they assist pre-service teachers in becoming composers and critics of their own music teaching worlds, the experienced school and university music educators may adopt for themselves more expansive visions of teaching and learning to teach. They may find the boundary between teaching and learning to teach less certain than they may have previously believed it to be.

Plurality, malleability, possibility, and uncertainty are ideas not typically associated with teaching and learning to teach. Indeed, these ideas could connote a music teacher preparation curriculum without substance or rigor. On the other hand, these ideas, in the real-world context of the professional development partnership, may form the heuristic by which pre-service teachers not only become fully conscious of their identity constructions, but also claim power over those forces that constrain them. Given the prevalence of high-stakes testing, both for new teachers and students, the standardization of the curriculum, and demands for predictability, it may be that teachers whose identities are shaped in professional development partnerships will not find easy, comfortable homes in contemporary schools. Yet, it may be these very teachers, who can live powerfully, whom we look to for courage to transform music education.

Notes

¹ Holmes Group, Tomorrow's Schools. East Lansing, MI, Holmes Group, 1990.

² See Susan Wharton Conkling and Warren Henry, "Professional Development Partnerships: A New Model for Music Teacher Preparation," Arts Education Policy Review 100 no. 4 (March/April, 1999): 19-23.

³ Paul G. Woodford, "The Social Construction of Music Teacher Identity in Undergraduate Music Education Majors," in The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning, ed. Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 690.

⁴ F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, Teachers as Curriculum Planners: Narratives of Experience (New York, Teachers College Press, 1988).

⁵ F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice* (New York, Teachers College Press, 1999), 94-95.

⁶ Deborah P. Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 13.

⁷ Daniel Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

⁸ Anna E. Richert, "Voice and Power in Teaching and Learning to Teach" in *Reflective Teacher Education: Cases and Critiques* ed. Linda Valli, (Albany, NY: State University of New York press, 1992), 194-197.

⁹ Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education Still Under Siege* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1993), 34.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 28.

¹¹ Eleanor Duckworth, "Teaching as Research," *Harvard Educational Review* 56 no. 4 (Summer, 1986), 481-498.