

Performing a metamorphosis: a teaching performer or performing teacher?

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ABSTRACT:

The notion of a teaching artist has gained considerable popularity amongst freelance musicians seeking increased employment and performance experiences. This paper presents findings from the first phase of a longitudinal study which explored a shift in identity from performer to teacher as a professional percussionist retrained to become a classroom music teacher. Aiming to identify the effect that formal teacher training had upon the teaching artist, the study considered: 1) the inter-relationships between teaching and performance roles; 2) the rationale for a change in role; and 3) the balance between the two identities. Using a case study approach, the study comprised of interviews and observation of teaching practice. The participant demonstrated characteristics typical of a career change such as a desire to maintain more regular hours and income, and also a positive rationale for adopting a teaching role following positive teaching artist encounters. Findings emphasise the need for educators to be conversant with the emotional and educational needs of the growing numbers of performers who undertake teacher training so that teacher identity can develop through positive interactions with teaching and communicating music.

Background

“Those who can – do. Those who can’t – teach.”

This adage is often articulated: seen in staffrooms on coffee mugs, tee-shirts, posters and a myriad of other places, but why? What is the purpose of promoting this idea, which places teaching in such a negative light? In using these few words, ‘identities’ are distinguished from one another; perhaps being placed in neat ‘boxes’ in order to be studied further. However, there is nothing neat and tidy about studying performers, musicians, teachers and their identities.

This paper begins the narrative journey of documenting the identity change experienced by a professional percussionist as he undergoes his initial pre-service teacher training, embracing his desire to add classroom music teaching to his current identity of being a musician and teaching

artist. The conceptual framework has centered around three main areas: (1) the formation of the performer identity (including that of the teaching artist); (2) the formation of the teacher identity; and (3) factors which influence a shift in identity from performer to teacher.

Formation of the Musician Identity

MacDonald, Hargreaves & Miell, (2002) suggested that “[m]usic can be used to express aspects of personal identity but many individuals construct identities within music (eg, teacher, performer, composer, etc). Where does the quote end? The identification of a professional musician's identity, including a teaching artist identity, has steadily been gaining momentum as more musicians acknowledge, and researchers identify, the portfolio nature of musicians' careers.

Larson (2004) suggested that “teaching artists must excel both as educators and artists, mastering the theory and practice of both fields, as well as the unique theory and practice that lies at their intersections” (p.13). Research (Huhtanen 2004; Bennett 2004) indicates that the larger proportion of tertiary educated classical music practitioners (for example, pianists, violinists, clarinetists) train to become professional instrumentalists but fall back upon careers as teachers in educational institutions or in private studios: Weller (2004) described the education of musicians as having altered very little in that performance students tend to view teaching as “a ‘fall-back career’ if they ‘fail’ to make it big in the performing arena” (p.252). Although the interaction with teaching is often initially a way of overcoming insufficient performance opportunities, there is a growing awareness of this change towards portfolio careers, and long-term teaching roles are embraced positively by many.

Perceptions of success are critical to the career development of musicians, and there is hierarchical perception in musicians' self-report as a soloist, instrumentalist or educator. Reflecting on her own transition from the pursuit of a soloist career to that of a piano teacher, Huhtanen drew upon Freud's theory of mourning to explain that following a failure, the restoration of self-image and orientation towards reality requires the individual to release the fulfillment obtained previously from that which had been lost. Huhtanen categorised the piano teachers in her research either as realists who accepted teaching as an integral part of their musical identities, or as dreamers who engaged in teaching to meet financial obligations, and who possessed a traumatic relationship with their playing as a result of not having moved on from their performance dreams. In order for musicians to embrace a positive relationship with teaching, it is necessary to break down the existing barriers and to create a better understanding of the self-perception of musicians working in educational roles.

This crisis in self-identity is seen not only in graduate and early career musicians; it is also apparent in conservatorium teachers, who are themselves highly-trained performers. Gaunt (2004) researched teachers' perspectives on one-to-one tertiary instrumental lessons. Participants acknowledged that “artistic identity for a performing musician is a core issue...” (p. 64).

Formation of the Professional Teacher Identity

Professional teacher identity is “how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others” (Lasky, 2005, p.901). While there are many differing opinions as to which factors are more influential in the construction of teacher identity, Britzman (1991) stresses the importance of the complexity of relationships: “Enacted in every pedagogy are the tensions between knowing and being, thought and action, theory and practice, knowledge and experience, the technical and the existential, the objective and the subjective” (p.2). This construct of the professional self evolves in stages (Huberman, 1993) and, arguably, pre-service teacher training is a seminal factor. Bouij’s model for socialization into the music teacher arena (1998, p.25) asks the central questions of “Who can I be/who do I want to be?” (p.24) as part of his investigation of pre-service music teachers in Sweden.

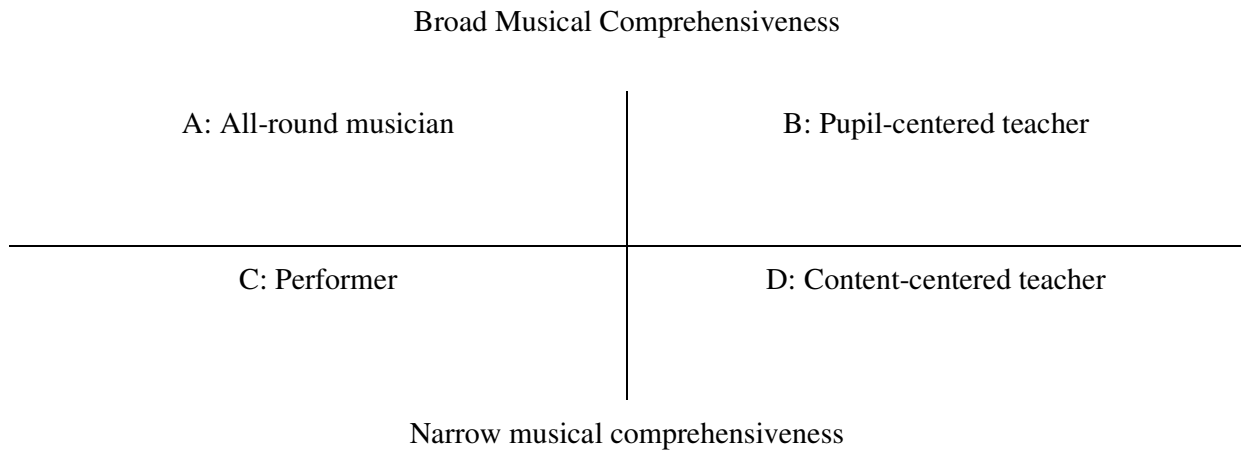


Figure 1: Salient role-identities in connection with music and teaching. (Bouij, 1998, p.25)

Bouij found that “[e]ach individual has a role-identity structure built around the activities that are more or less important in his life” (1998, p.26). Each of the participants interviewed for the study could be placed in one of the four quadrants with the possibility of some overlap of quadrants; giving insight into what sort of teacher each was striving to be as they pursued their pre-service training. This aligns with Bennett’s (2005) suggestion that musicians tend initially to self-define

according to their performance specialty: for example as a *violinist* or a *pianist*. Self-definition as a *musician* arises only after multiple roles are added to their practice.

Prior musical experiences also have a powerful influence, added to which changes throughout the period of pre-service education may also see the development of multiple identities as career goals develop. As the pre-service teacher continues to form an identity as a teacher as well as musician, there is often conflict. The stabilisation of these dual-identities often does not occur until the graduate has gained employment, at which point socialisation into the profession occurs. (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Flores & Day, 2006).

Shifting Identities (or layering of identities?)

In the past decade there has been a growing empirical body of research on identity and career change, with a particular focus on classroom teachers. In the musical realm, the work by Hargreaves, et al, (2002) has been at the forefront in opening discussions on changing musical identities. It is at the intersection of these two general bodies of research that we place this current study. Which two general bodies – does it refer to the following passage? Bouij's research (1998) supports the notion that a change in identity is based on either new or changed interests, and adds that new activities can inspire a change in an individual's interest which may also lead to a change in identity: “[t]he new activity ... may, in the end, supply the role support needed to develop or sustain the new interest” (p.26-27). Duckworth (1986) maintains that in order to learn, students must engage in or with a phenomenon and then try to explain and make sense of that phenomenon. Pre-service teachers often enter their period of training (and even their first year of employment) not fully-informed of all aspects of teaching, but embrace these as the need and opportunity arise.

Richardson and Watt (2005) suggest key factors relevant to graduates' choice of teaching as a career. These factors relate to personal and social status; career fit of teaching with individual goals; time for family; prior consideration in making the decision to teach; and family support for this decision. Far from turning to teaching because of unrealised performance ambitions, the participant in this study was one of a growing number of successful performers seeking to add teaching to their portfolios.

Process

There has been a noticeable increase in enquiries from local professional musicians seeking to undergo pre-service teacher training. This has partially been the result of the Western Australian College of Teaching Act 2004 (reference), which requires all teachers working in schools to be registered. The registration procedure requires each teacher, including music tutors, to hold a formal teaching qualification. As a result, many musicians are seeking formal qualification either to retain existing employment, or to gain a school-based teaching position.

The Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Music Education courses at The University of Western Australia share common 1st and 2nd years. As a result, it is possible for performance graduates to achieve the Bachelor of Music Education degree if they return to complete the final two years within the education stream. This offers graduates an alternative to the more common Graduate Diploma, which is a one-year qualification offered within the Faculty of Education. Robin (not his real name) was one of the first experienced professional musicians to have formally enrolled in the undergraduate music education degree rather than the Graduate Diploma of Education, and so case study methodology was deemed to be an appropriate approach for the longitudinal study.

During the first year of Robin's pre-service teacher training, a number of informal conversations took place between Robin and one of the researchers of this project, who was one of his university lecturers/practicum supervisors. At the conclusion of Robin's first year of pre-service training, a formal interview was scheduled in order to determine the effect of this pre-service teacher training upon Robin's established performer identity, and his developing teacher identity. The formal interview was recorded and a transcription of the interview was returned to Robin for verification of accuracy and for any further elaboration of his answers.

Robin's case seemed atypical in the sense of the prior experiences that had led him to pursue this path of further study. Robin's professional focus was as a chamber music percussionist who, for the past couple of years, had developed a growing interest in the music education of young children; an interest further fuelled when the percussion group in which he played began to have an increased involvement in education and community work. Robin's identity had progressed from performer though to teaching artist and, later, he was developing a classroom teacher identity. Would the identities co-exist, or would they create friction?

Results and Discussion

In this section, the results and discussion will be presented in three parts, all of which draw material from interviews and from observation of Robin's teaching in simulated and situated teaching environments. The first part details a brief overview of Robin's training path to become a professional percussionist and his perceived identity as a professional musician. The second part reveals the influences on his decision to 'add' teaching to his professional identity, and the third part of this section presents Robin's perception of his identity shift as he completes the first of two years of pre-service teacher training.

Descriptive case: professional life - background and identity

Robin began percussion studies as a five-year-old child, when his parents bought him drums. Formal music studies took place at a Darwin (Northern Territory, Australia) state school. Later, Robin auditioned for tertiary music studies in performance and completed a Diploma in Performing Arts before converting to a Bachelor of Performance (Classical). Robin's goal at this point was a career as a professional percussionist. Robin successfully auditioned for a number of orchestras around the country; he "saw the opportunities of playing in an orchestra"; however, after six years of pursuing a career as an orchestral musician, Robin felt that there was something missing and travelled overseas. He auditioned in New York and San Francisco before accepting a place in a Performance Masters program in Europe. Whilst there, he was drawn to the "adventurous nature of the music scene" and began to work with other artforms such as dance, and became involved in the creation of new works. However, one year later Robin felt the call for home (a return to Perth) where a chamber percussion ensemble was being reformed.

As a percussionist, Robin sought engagement with as many different genres of music (jazz, Latin, salsa) and varieties of performance (orchestral, chamber, contemporary dance, theatre in the park, improvisation) as possible. At times he "felt like a jack-of-all-trades" in order to make a living; however he "enjoyed the diversity of work and having a broad musical identity", and "enjoyed learning from the different areas of involvement". It was during this time that the chamber percussion ensemble of which he was a member began to diversify their activities to include educational concerts and workshops for schools. The members of this ensemble became teaching artists and their individual identities as performing musicians grew as well.

Changing his professional identity from one of an orchestral musician to that of a member of a chamber percussion ensemble was seen by Robin to be a positive move. He spoke of the need for creative stimulation, and felt that life as purely an orchestral musician did not quite fit his

temperament. In short, Robin suggested that small-scale chamber music work means that one is “more able to express yourself musically”. He saw orchestral percussionists as having to be:

note perfect, beat perfect: the best orchestral percussionists are the patient types, lining up something in the score. You need to be that sort of person. That's not who I am. ... That wasn't music to me; you were a colour on the fringes. I didn't like that. I wanted to be noticed as a musician, just as a trumpeter is noticed in the orchestra.

The addition of teaching to Robin's professional identity

a) In general, how do you see the role of the classroom teacher and teaching artist connecting?

Robin stated that, when teaching, he remembered his role as a student and sought to evoke the memories of what he had found interesting. When he taught, he thought of how he was taught and feels that his identity as a teacher is an amalgamation of all the teachers he has had. He separated the ‘how’ of teaching from the ‘what’ to teach: the subject matter was separate. He consciously searched for that which would interest the students and make music accessible to them. He organised “hands-on” opportunities for his students, and described himself as being more conscious now (than when his identity was that of a teaching artist in the percussion ensemble) of the pedagogical steps involved in teaching: “[t]his year has been the year of looking professional and how is this all put together (musical theory) and how you will teach the steps. I have more of a sense of the big picture now.” “This year, I was more of a teacher; drew from my playing background. Subject matter was drawn from professional life as a teaching artist.” In many ways, Robin felt that he was still “jumping in and out of roles. I'm still working this out in my head, perhaps if you ask me in a year.”

b) Was it a frustration not to be able to share your identity as a performer with the children?

Robin regretted that as a classroom music teacher he was unable to share more of his playing experiences with his students; however he was already forging opportunities to connect his performance experience with the school in which he was undertaking his teaching practice: “*No; my ensemble will play tomorrow night as part of a school concert - mixing children as performers with the group. Perhaps there will be a rush of new percussionists, as students, due to this inspiration.*”

c) When did you first discover your interest in becoming a music teacher? Would this be the first question? It reads more logically that way round!

Robin described having an initially negative view of teaching: “I saw the notion of the performer as “the elite” and becoming a teacher was like giving up. I think this is true that a lot of performers.”

Teaching artist experience with the chamber percussion ensemble provided an insight into teaching which fostered a much more positive view: “My interest grew with leading workshops as part of being a member of the chamber percussion ensemble - being a teaching artist. Up to this point I had pretty much shunned the notion of being a classroom music teacher. I saw it as a step backwards.”

d) Why/when did you decide to change career paths? I would see this as the 2nd question and suggest moving and re-labelling it

Robin described a lengthy transition into teaching driven by dissatisfaction with his performance role coupled with enjoyment derived from teaching experiences. “My decision to enrol in this degree (BMusEd) was basically a 'let's see what will happen'. I knew that there had to be a change from what I was already doing.” Reflective of Mill’s (2003) findings, Bennett (2005) found that attrition from the music profession occurred for five key reasons: insufficient performance opportunities, lack of financial security, unsociable hours, injury, and lack of practitioner diversity. Irregularity of income was a major contributing factor prompting musicians to change their performance role. Robin’s comments reflected this research:

I felt the frustration too, of being a professional musician, and the unreliable aspects to being a professional musician in terms of financial security, working hours, consistent working hours, getting married this year, time in general with family on a regular basis, good family closeness - I came from such a family and want that for my own family. I spent 8 months on the road last year which helped me to see that a teaching lifestyle was what I wanted.

Robin further debated his decision to change career paths when he undertook his first school placement (practicum) in a primary school. “The decision was cemented on first prac - I knew at the end of the prac. At start of prac I was a little unsure ... but the end of the prac the answer was definitely yes.” Crucially, Robin doesn't see himself as a failed performer; the adoption of a teaching role is fully-accepted and is viewed as a positive lifestyle change. “This year has allowed a new joy, not closing a door but opening another. I am still as passionate about the teaching - aiming for high standards, and I recognise that in order to achieve these high standards for a school program, I will need to spend time working on this.”

Descriptive case: identity shift

Robin aims to be both a highly-skilled performer and an excellent classroom pedagogue - a notion that supports the pre-service teacher identity research by both Bouij (1998) and musician/teaching

artist research by Larson (ref). Atypical of first year pre-service teachers, Robin is both child-centered and music-centered in his approach and has enjoyed the challenges of beginning to develop a more formal professional identity as a teacher whilst still maintaining his identity as a professional percussionist.

e) Is this a complete change of career path or only partial? What do you think the balance will be in your future working life as a teacher or teaching artist?

“At this point - partial, not a secure decision as yet. I still want to play and want to keep the old way of life (as a performer) until my teacher training has finished. I don't want to move “cold-turkey” from one to the other. ... I think that the more you can link in and tap into the passion of music the better, showing enthusiasm to kids. It is cool to say you are playing the closing Festival of Perth to the kids. For them to see a working musician in the classroom is stimulating.”

f) At what level (primary or secondary) do you see yourself mainly working in the future?

Robin's response to this question was based largely upon his prior teaching experiences. The question will be repeated at the end of his second pre-service year, at which point he will have experienced the secondary classroom. “Primary school: even though I haven't done the secondary pracs yet, I have had some experience (with our percussion ensemble) to know that I want to work with the younger children. I want to influence music and its role in society and I recognise the need to start early with young kids.”

Concluding comments

Robin described his first year of pre-service teacher training as giving him confidence as he has seen that he has the ability to teach as well as to enjoy a reduced performance career. The performance career has informed his teaching and his teaching has expanded the view of being a performer: “[i]t is not just about turning up to the gig and playing.” Robin is happy with his multiple identities of performer, teaching artist and teacher. At the moment he also feels a tinge of sadness as his self-identity shifts from being a professional performer. He still identifies more as a performer than teacher and hopes that his future identity - short term (2 - 3 years) may permit an equal split of part-time teaching and playing. He also wants to be able to achieve a lifestyle balance and to embrace family commitments.

One of the main questions that we sought to answer was the notion of whether this was an identity shift or rather a reshaping or layering of additional professional identities. It appears to be both. At the moment, it is the existence of dual identities: that of professional performer as well as the newly

emerging identity of classroom music teacher. The shift occurs in the percentage balance within the dual identities.

In essence, Robin is currently feeling the instability of how it feels as an identity shift/layering occurs. Uncertainty about what lies ahead contributes to this angst, but he remains positive that he is on the right path. Typical of many performance-based musicians, Robin desires “stability in lifestyle.” However, he fears that opportunities to achieve that balance may be limited: “[l]ife as a professional musician isn't predictable, whereas teaching is organised and there are frustrations of the boss saying two things: ‘we love you as a professional musician but [we] want stability; not applying for leave to play a gig.’” Robin feels that he may initially be forced to accept a full-time teaching position and that “professional musician activities” will become hobby pursuits.

At what point would one say that professional identity is fully-formed? Professional identity is subject to the constant change that takes place as we react to social, political and other contexts, and as such it is argued that it will continue to evolve throughout our professional lives. It is becoming increasingly common for performance graduates to return to university and to engage in formal teacher training. Many of these graduates identify as performers, and it is important that – whatever the rationale for their return to study – educators are conversant with the emotional and educational needs of this cohort so that the teacher identity develops through positive interactions with teaching and communicating music.

The high-level performance skills and professional experience in a wide variety of professional endeavors enables performers to embrace an expansive vision of music-making, teaching and learning. This case study provides us with an insight into the initial stages of the process when a performer adds layers of identity to incorporate teaching, and then takes formal training to become a classroom music teacher. Robin’s progress through his final pre-service year and into the teaching profession will further inform our understanding of this important area of research.

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