

Evaluating Graduate Education and Transcending Biases in Music Teachers' Professional Development¹

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Abstract

Research concerning professional development and its contribution to the formation of professional identity is prevalent in both general and music education. However, its implications for music educators in the context of graduate programs for music education are seldom discussed. This mixed-methods case study examined experienced music teachers' perceptions during and after participation in a two-year teacher-college graduate program for music education. These M.Ed. students ($n=22$) underwent semi-structured interviews after Year 1 and completed closed and open questionnaires after Years 1 and 2, assessing students' evaluation of the experienced curriculum and of its contribution to their professional development, thereby eliciting biases regarding the characteristics of music teachers' professional identities. Content analysis of qualitative data yielded four global categories: music versus education, research relevance for music educators, desired curriculum, and community of learners. Qualitative and quantitative results revealed students' criticism of the experienced curriculum. Regarding the program's contribution (quantitative results), students reported developing more positive attitudes toward the pursuit of music education and research but reported only minimally changing their traditionally negative views about the relevance of research and educational theory to their training. Although students' behavioral practice changed significantly during graduate studies (quantitative results), changes did not achieve conscious awareness (thus were not evident in the qualitative and some quantitative results). Outcomes suggest that resolving the traditional conflict between the roles of educator and musician, and acceptance of the researcher role within one's multifaceted professional identity, may foster teachers' inquisitiveness and critical ability and may lead music educators to join in establishing a community that more unbiasedly espouses both music education and empirical inquiry.

Keywords: music teacher education, professional development, identity, music education research, graduate studies

1. Introduction

1.1 The Context of Music Education

This study developed out of the pressing need to evaluate the contribution of teacher-college graduate studies in music education to students' professional development. Bauer (2007) observed that although the research literature is quite large for teachers' professional development in general, relatively few studies have systematically examined the professional development of music educators in particular. The need for professional development research focusing on "communities of practice" in inquiry-based settings within the arts in general and specifically within music education was further emphasized by Conway (2011).

Identity research as related to teachers' practice and professional development is prevalent in both general and music education (Ballantyne, Kerchner, & Arostegui, 2012). However, its implications for music educators in the context of graduate programs for music education are seldom discussed. Furthermore, research outcomes from the field of music education are traditionally studied in isolation, within the professional boundaries of the music education discipline, and

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are rarely discussed within the broader context of general education. As a result, the latter is hardly ever enriched by insights from the particular field of music study. It is my intention to counteract this tradition by contributing a music education perspective to the general discussion concerning teachers' training and professional identities that transpires in this inclusive professional educational journal.

Rodgers and Scott (2008) invite teachers to consolidate the consciousness of their professional identity within the context of the relations and emotions that make up their entire set of identities. Taking music education as a case study, I investigated not only students' evaluation of their graduate program and assessment of its contribution to their professional development, but also how these evaluations evoked their perceptions and biases regarding the characteristics of music teachers professional identities.

1.2 The Traditional Bias toward a "Musician" Identity Rather Than an "Educator" Identity

The field of music education has undergone far-reaching transformations that bear considerable implications for teachers' professional development and identity discourse. It is now a field that seeks connections with other disciplines and is viewed as situated within varied contexts in order to better understand complex processes. Philosophical and conceptual changes in the field of music education are linked to these transformations. Music itself is no longer perceived only as an autonomous aesthetic field. Rather, music is seen as situated in a historical sociocultural context, shaping and reflecting its time and place (Cook, 1998), and also as situated in new multidimensional contexts that integrate music with a range of other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Such interdisciplinary connections are now achieved through branches of learning such as the sociology and psychology of music, ethnomusicology, and others (BERA Music Education Review Group, 2004; Cox & Pitts, 2003). In addition, music education now accentuates emerging processes in the relationships between humans and music – at the individual, group, social, and cultural levels. Such a broad fabric of associations calls for complex new identities for music educators that blend "interdisciplinary" and "multicultural" roles. It is increasingly understood that in order to significantly advance music education, music teachers must expand the horizons of their knowledge to facilitate a more complex understanding of teaching and learning processes (Welch & McPherson, 2012). To achieve such a fuller understanding, music teachers today are increasingly expected to harmoniously incorporate a host of professional identities (Bernard, 2005; Dolloff, 2007).

Until recently, music teacher education was based on a traditional core comprising the basics of musical language and methods for teaching it – thus reflecting teachers' primary professional identity as "musicians" (Nierman, Zeichner, & Hobbel, 2002; Roberts, 1991). "Teacher education in music, with its emphasis on content knowledge, seems to be substantially different from teacher preparation programs in other disciplines, in which methods, curriculum, psychology, and philosophy courses are the core of professional preparation" (Nierman et al., 2002, p. 826). Tom Regelski, claimed that "where teaching certification is required, the 'teacher education' courses, typically a very small percentage of a music teacher's preparation, are the least rigorous part of their training, and are often decried as 'merely theoretical' or otherwise impractical, ineffective, or a waste of time better spent in the practice room" (Regelski, 2009, p. 4). Richard Colwell (2009, p. 141), in his attempt to formulate a research agenda for the field, similarly observed: "The present research focus in music education is principally the content of music, and secondarily, pedagogical content knowledge." Music education has been traditionally considered praxis, underscoring performance-teaching while paying less attention to theories of music education as such. Consequently, higher value has traditionally been ascribed to performance than to education (Dolloff, 1999; Frierson-Campbell, 2004; Musomeci, 1998; Roberts, 1991; Scheib, 2006). This traditional bias of music educators against the field of education in general is aptly expressed by George Bernard Shaw (1903) in his famous epithet: "He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches."

Let me illustrate this bias with a personal vignette: Many years ago, I was a doctoral student at Yale University's music department, and the time came for writing my dissertation proposal. I approached a professor who was an expert on 19th century music and told him that I would like to research the repertoire of pedagogical piano music that was composed in the 1800s for children to play. The professor looked at me and said that he did not think this was such a good idea. Instead, he suggested I should concentrate on canonic repertoire and not waste my time on second rate music that was composed for educational purposes. This was my first encounter with the prevailing tension between music educators' status as a creative musician versus as an educator, not merely regarding my research interests but also as an implicit working bias with potential influence on my professional development.

In the field of music education today, despite far-reaching changes occurring over recent decades, this bias continues to be widely accepted, reflecting the low status traditionally ascribed by musicians to education (Roberts, 2004). Many students in contemporary music education programs still experience a conflict between their identity as a musician and their role as a teacher. This ambiguity of identity leads to indecisiveness in curricular decision making (Dolloff, 2007).

1.3 Additional Professional Identity Biases: Music Teacher versus Researcher

The concept of identity is no longer understood as a fixed attribute of a person, but rather is seen as a relational phenomenon. Identity development occurs in an intersubjective field and can best be characterized as an ongoing process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context (Gee, 2001).

As a conceptual framework for examining possible conflicts between the different identities of music educators, MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell (2002) demarcated "identities in music" (IIM) from "music in identities" (MII). The IIM construct is defined as the ways in which people view themselves in relation to social and cultural roles within music – such as the identities of musician, composer, performer and teacher. The MII construct refers to the ways in which music forms a part of other aspects of the individual's self-image, such as those relating to gender, age, national and cultural identity, and so on. Examination of the latter MII construct in the context of graduate studies for music education is beyond the scope of this article (see, for example, Laor, 2014a).

In the general field of education, the understanding that teachers' roles are complex, reaching far beyond the role of mere "disseminator of knowledge," evolved during the teacher research movement of the 1980s. This movement espoused a different view of the teacher as a knower and thinker and as a "re-searcher" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 15) who did not merely need to receive empirical findings from university-based researchers but rather needed more dialogue with other teachers that would generate theories grounded in practice to be tested empirically. Yet, the broadened view of the teacher as researcher that evolved in general education during the 1980s did not find its match in the field of music education. Liora Bresler's (1993) critique of the first handbook of research on music teaching and learning (Colwell, 1992), which constituted a landmark in its contribution to the field, was that the handbook portrayed a picture of the music education field as placing little attention on the roles teachers might play in generating and contributing to this knowledge base. The split between music educators and research appears to reflect the traditionally entrenched conception of the separation between art and science, as observed by Bennett Reimer (1981, p. 141) a decade earlier: "I cannot help but feel that a part of their [music teachers'] uneasiness comes from their perception that much of our research seems to be unrelated to the art they cherish." It is almost ironic that the qualitative research paradigm, which Eisner (1991) viewed as stemming from the arts, was largely ignored by music educators during the time of the teacher research movement (Roberts, 1994).

In recent decades, rapid scientific and empirical developments in the field of music education, such as the availability of enhanced research tools in areas like musical perception and cognition as well as innovative empirical studies of the human brain (Welch & McPherson, 2012) have begun to promote an additional new identity of "researcher" for music educators. Nonetheless, traditional positions that view the educator role as conflicting with the musician role may similarly lead to a bias against this relatively new researcher role during music teachers' training.

In assessing music teachers' perceptions regarding their professional development, which may provide a window into their identity biases, it is important to note that cognitive attitudes and valuations are often based on the theoretical status ascribed to the field under consideration. Research on attitudes and behavioral practices has shown that modifications in people's attitudes may lag behind their changes in practice. Behavioral practice may change through emulation and training, often without achieving conscious reflection, whereas change in cognitive attitudes and valuations may need some prior critical differentiation and continuous internalization as well as social facilitation (Ajzen, 2002a, 2002b).

1.4 The Importance of Graduate Music Education Curricula

Music education curricula during graduate studies hold vast potential for fostering the optimal development of music teachers' complex set of identities. The goal of such contemporary curricula should be to promote not only graduate students' traditional identity as musicians who impart music as an autonomous discipline but also graduate students' identities as educators and researchers within a broad multidimensional and multicultural context. Such a broad professional worldview should enable music educators to bridge the gaps between theory and practice, to implement this vision of music in their daily pedagogical activity, and to use it as a foundation for applied research in their fields of interest. Despite graduate studies' potentially important role to serve as a catalyst for teachers' professional development, research evaluating graduate studies in music education is scarce (Barrett, 2009), and most available information remains in the form of mere program descriptions such as those found on various websites (Nierman et al., 2002).

1.5 Study Objectives

The present case study examined a contemporary, interdisciplinary, multicultural, research-oriented graduate program for advanced music and music education studies at a teachers' college in Israel. The purpose of this mixed-methods study (comprising semi-structured interviews and written questionnaires) was to document and critically examine how participation in this music education graduate program could: (a) affect experienced music teachers' cognitive attitudes regarding the program's newly emerging culture within the context of the teachers college (i.e., its interdisciplinary and research-oriented dimensions); and (b) influence these graduate students' professional development and (c) offer a

window into students' perceptions and biases about their professional identities. For example, the study considered how students' attitudes toward research evolved over the course of their graduate studies, regarding research's relevance to their practice of music education, the development of practice-based empirical interests, and the extent to which students assimilated the role of researcher into their professional identity.

1.6 Study Questions

The present study examined the following questions:

1. Do students of music education (experienced music teachers) who are exposed during the course of their graduate studies to the multifaceted dimensions of their practice (e.g., theories of education, research methodologies, and group practice-based critical dialogue) perceive these dimensions as pertinent to the field of music education?
2. Do the students perceive these dimensions as effective in promoting their professional development and identity construction?

2. Method

2.1 The Graduate Program Case

The Levinsky Graduate Program for Music Education, established in 2004 in Tel-Aviv, Israel, combines advanced music and music education studies together with courses in general education and research methods. Students enrolled in this M.Ed. program in music are experienced inservice music teachers. The master's program consists of 44 semester hours delivered 1.5 days per week over two years. It offers a learning environment that promotes professional reflective and critical dialogue about students' practice as music educators. The program also promotes peer study and research, which are rare in the Israeli music education milieu. Notably, very few opportunities are available for experienced Israeli inservice music teachers to gather and to take part in communal professional discussion with their colleagues. During the time spent in the program, students can participate in such dialogue, form study groups, and experience what it means to belong to a "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998). The M.Ed. program includes five components: Advanced music education studies; advanced music studies; general education studies; research methods studies; and research project workshop.

2.1.1 Advanced Music Education Studies

The objective of this component of the graduate program is to offer courses that foster students' development as music educators who are up-to-date and well versed in the theory and practice of music education. Special attention is placed on cultural, social, and community issues in music education, in particular the "here and now" in the multicultural society of 21st century Israel.

2.1.2 Advanced Music Studies

This program component aims to offer courses that develop music teachers as musicians. The track comprises three primary development channels:

- Music from an intra-disciplinary perspective – fostering knowledge expansion within the discipline itself.
- Music from an interdisciplinary perspective – providing tools to discuss the discipline from other points of view such as those of other artistic fields, historical perspectives, or different social sciences.
- Music from a practical perspective – developing students' performance abilities and skills via an artist workshop format where students present their musical performance and receive feedback from the group and from the artist facilitator.

2.1.3 General Education Studies

The objective of this program component is to offer courses that provide students with a broad foundation in current educational issues. The theoretical framework of this component covers a range of topics including the sociology, philosophy, psychology, and anthropology of education.

2.1.4 Research Methods Studies

This program component aims to offer courses that explore the rationales, assumptions, and principles of various quantitative as well as qualitative research paradigms to enable students to locate their preferred approaches vis-à-vis current scholarship. These studies furnish a framework for discussing general issues about alternative relationships between theory and practice.

2.1.5 Research Project Workshop

At the core of the M.Ed. program is an applied research project that offers integrative space for critical dialogue and

feedback among students and between students and teachers. Students begin planning the project near the end of their first year and gradually continue throughout the second year, supported by the project workshop framework and their various courses. For example, courses in research methods provide a methodological basis, while music education studies help them describe and investigate major issues and dilemmas in the work of music teachers within the context of Israeli formal and informal music education.

2.2 Participants

Participants were 22 experienced music educators (3 men, 19 women, ages 32-42 years) who enrolled in the two-year M.Ed. program. Participants represented various ethnic and social groups in Israeli society (Jewish and Arab, religious and secular). They represented a variety of music specialties (performers, choir conductors, composers) as well as different educational specialties (early childhood specialists, high-school and higher education teachers, special education and gifted children specialists, conservatory teachers), thus spanning the Israeli music education environment.

2.3 Measures

At the end of Year 1 of the program, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants to elicit their perceptions regarding their learning experience, specifically about their curriculum and the curriculum's contribution to their professional development. The transcribed interviews underwent content analysis, and global categories were formulated.

At each of two intervals, at the end of Years 1 and 2, the same 15-item questionnaire was administered, developed for the purpose of the current study, inviting respondents to give the Levinsky College of Education anonymous feedback on their own curriculum. The questionnaire comprised two 7-item closed subscales, one relating to "various aspects of the program" and the other relating to these aspects' "contribution to teacher professional development," as well as one open-ended question inviting students to offer recommendations for the program's improvement. The *program evaluation* subscale focused on the curriculum's perceived input with regard to aspects like evaluation of tasks, body of knowledge, and quality of instruction (e.g., "Most of the courses in the program contribute to my music education;" "I am satisfied with the level of instruction in most of the courses") and showed a Cronbach α of .80. The *program contribution* subscale focused on the curriculum's output regarding perceived changes in students' professional development and identity such as changes in one's desire to expand activities, one's sense of empowerment to initiate change, or one's ability to exchange ideas, connect theory to work, or take an empirical perspective (e.g., "Following the master's degree in music education, I feel empowered to change things at my workplace;" "Knowledge of theories helps me reexamine my work in the field"), with a Cronbach α of .88. Each closed item was rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from not at all (1) to very much (6). Responses to the open question underwent content analysis, and categories were formulated.

2.4 Procedure

The interviews were conducted by two college faculty members from two different disciplines and lasted 30-45 minutes. Students were asked to express their opinions about their learning experience: how they perceived the curriculum and how they perceived its contribution to their professional development. The written questionnaires were administered anonymously during class sessions. For all measures, students were told that the college would like to use their ideas to improve the program. For the interviews and written open question, students were invited to give their recommendations. The interviews and questionnaires were delivered in random order.

3. Results

3.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews and written responses to the questionnaire's open question (at both intervals) underwent content analysis, which yielded four global categories: music versus education (related to program evaluation), research relevance (related to both program evaluation and program contribution), the desired curriculum (related to program evaluation), and community of learners (related to program contribution).

3.1.1 Music versus Education

Most of the students expressed disappointment that the education courses were mandatory, preferring to substitute them with music courses. They viewed education courses as marginal to their main field of interest and practice: "I would recommend changing the ratio between music courses and research and education courses to increase the number of music courses;" "I understand the importance of the connection between the program's mission and education, but for me music is more meaningful;" "Please concentrate more on music rather than on education; I feel like I am walking alongside the spring and not bathing in it."

3.1.2 Relevance of Research to Music Educators

Students viewed the qualitative and quantitative research methodology courses in particular, and the notion of research in general, as irrelevant to students' work and professional development as a music educator: "Is it mandatory to have so many research courses?"; "If research, then I would rather have research on notes music analysis."

3.1.3 The Desired Curriculum

Some students' descriptions of their desired curriculum resembled their prior undergraduate curriculum: "Please add courses in music theory, harmony, solfège, and music history;" "I would like to see courses in music listening, music history and music analysis;" "I would like to have more opportunities for music performance, vocal ensembles, and conducting brass bands."

3.1.4 Community of Learners

The formation of a community of learners, all of whom are music educators, was viewed by the students as one of the program's strengths. This community was described as a source of knowledge and as providing professional and social support to its members: "The group empowers me and gives me strength;" "I enjoy the group, the professional interaction, and the support of people with shared interests;" "The interaction with the group was very meaningful. I suggest strengthening and structuring such interactions within the course of study, for sharing experiences and for analysis of coping mechanisms between the members of the student group;" "It is important to hold a discussion group feedback and peer critique] regarding our developing professional work."

3.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

At each interval, students rated the program significantly lower than they rated its contribution to their professional development. At the end of Year 1, program evaluation was $M = 4.38$, $SD = .64$, whereas program contribution was $M = 4.97$, $SD = .66$, $t(21) = 2.66$, $p < .05$. At the end of Year 2, program evaluation was $M = 4.52$, $SD = .71$, whereas program contribution was $M = 5.04$, $SD = .79$, $t(21) = 2.23$, $p < .05$.

4. Discussion and Educational Importance

This study was undertaken to fill a lacuna in the field of graduate music education (Barrett, 2009; Colwell, 1985; Conway, 2011; Conway, Eros, & Stanley, 2009; Hookey, 2002; Nierman et al., 2002). The present findings demonstrated an interesting pattern of graduate students' self-reports elicited over the course of the interdisciplinary research-oriented Israeli teachers college program. The major finding was that, at the end of each year of study, these experienced inservice teachers consistently gave lower quantitative evaluations of their program curriculum than they did of the curriculum's contribution to their professional development. The lower quantitative ratings of the program curriculum were corroborated by students' qualitative responses, which reflected graduate students' criticism against the need for courses pertaining to research methodologies and educational theories. These findings seemed to indicate these M.Ed. students' perpetuation of the conservative, traditional bias envisioning educational theory and research as irrelevant to music, perhaps revealing attitudes that may have formed during students' undergraduate studies and even earlier. On the other hand, the students' quantitative evaluations of their program's contribution to their own professional development – as music educators whose practices now actively do integrate research and educational theory – were higher than might be expected in light of their critical stance toward the education and research methodology curriculum. Students reported that they had improved their capacity to employ theory and research perspectives in their practice as music educators, indicating a possible broadening of identities.

Thus, the current mixed-method design appeared to allow for deeper understanding of the research questions at hand (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), exposing tensions between some of the quantitative findings (about the program's evaluation backed by the qualitative findings) and some other quantitative findings relating to that program's contribution. These tensions may indicate a gap where teachers reported on their new research and education-related skills; yet, their cognitive bias against research and theory seemed to persist, without conscious awareness of their new, less traditional practices. Thus, the students' overt negative attitudes appeared to perpetuate the enduring animosity between music teachers and research (Brand, 1984; Colwell, 2009; Reimer, 1981; Roberts, 1994), reflecting the historical bias whereby music educators have consistently valued art over science, considering music to be the fruit of genius rather than of education (Laor, 2014b). Although the students' valuation of theoretical and empirical study may have developed latently during the course of their graduate studies, unfortunately, these latent processes seemed to have had very little impact on students' entrenched bias against actually studying those contents. Given that socially controlled bias and cognitive dissonance (Ajzen, 2002a, 2002b), in the long run, could damage the positive outcomes of the graduate program, the current results call for further investigation. Focus should be placed on designing educational and social methods of ameliorating this said bias, which may include enhancing self-awareness of latent changes and practices that are positively influenced by the ostensibly criticized graduate courses in music research and education.

Music educators have been slow to adopt qualitative research methods, and even slower to apply these methods to the

study of their own practice (Leglar & Collay, 2002). Moreover, leading figures in music education claimed that qualitative research is so difficult and sensitive as to be almost impossible (Swanwick 1981 in Roberts, 1994, p.27). The degree to which music educators are involved in practice-based research is determined, among other things, by their background knowledge and attitudes toward both educational and research theory (Leblanc, 2003). Hence, a revision of graduate as well as undergraduate curricula in music education is called for at this juncture. Such revision may help further test the question of how an inquiry-based curriculum supports the development of professional practitioners. In addition, the creation of a community of learners was perceived by these music education students as a source of empowerment, to be achieved through professional dialogue and shared experiences, and as one of the program's strengths. The creation of a community of practice, whose members share a concern or a passion for something they do and, together, learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (to use Etienne Wenger's 1998 concept) can guide curricula revision. Once successfully implemented, such revision could also lead music educators of all ranks to join in establishing a community that espouses, with much less ambivalence, both music and inquiry as part of their newly emerging professional identity.

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