

Evoking Beliefs About Music Teaching And Learning

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Abstract: This paper explores the importance of examining teacher images as an element of music teacher education. Focusing on teacher pictures drawn by graduate and undergraduate music education students as a way of initiating dialogue between personal and professional theory, it presents a way of bridging the gap between the theory of the university programme and that of professional practice. Students work in a spirit of reflexive inquiry and use picture drawing, in addition to story writing and metaphor, to explore their personal theories of music teaching and what it means to be a "teacher."

There has been a great deal of talk in music teacher education programmes about bridging theory and practice in order to improve teaching. Many times students do not perceive theory taught in music education courses as being particularly relevant to the reality of teaching. Theory is even sometimes seen as contrary to the needs and reality of practice. There exists in the minds of students, therefore, a dissonance between teacher education and teacher practice. While many teacher educators seek to make programmes more relevant, or to increase the "hands-on" time that pre-service teachers spend in the classroom, there has been little discussion of the role played by the personal theories that students bring with them to the teacher education enterprise. Even less thought has been given to how those personal theories are portrayed, or have developed out of formal and informal observations of practice.

In an attempt to identify teacher beliefs at the pre-service and in-service career stages I have been developing a multi-faceted approach to portraying and examining personal theory (Dolloff, 1999a,b). Working in a spirit of reflexive inquiry, students use story writing, metaphor and picture drawing to explore their personal theories of music teaching and what it means to be a "teacher." The process of drawing teachers and teaching contexts has made explicit many pre-verbal and long-held beliefs about teacher appearance, teacher behaviour and teaching situations. This paper will explore the importance of examining teaching images as an element of music teacher education. It will focus, in particular, on the drawing of teacher pictures as one way of initiating the dialogue between personal and professional theory, fantasy and reality, so critical to bridging the gap between the theory of the university programme and that of professional practice.

Teacher Role Identity

Students come to formal music teacher education with a wealth of personal knowledge about teachers and teaching built up over the many years of study in school and studio. Knowles (1992) maintains that the recollections of teachers and experiences become internalized into their own individual teacher role identities (p. 131)--an image of themselves as teachers that they bring to teacher education. Traditionally, however, music education courses, particularly

methods courses, have not addressed the development of teacher role identity. Roberts (1991) moreover, maintains that music education majors' perception of themselves primarily as "musicians," rather than as "teachers," leads to conflict in the development of their teacher role identities. According to Roberts, this conflict is actually nurtured by the structure of university music education programmes. He notes, in particular, that music education students appeared to "lack any on-going construction" of their identities as teacher, except in the form of "musician as teacher" (p. 34). It is important, then in the context of the music education programme, to help students see past their subject matter focus by identifying underlying images and beliefs about teachers and teaching so that these personal theories can be integrated with the multiple realities of teaching practice.

Drawing Our Beliefs

Many teacher education researchers have been exploring the use of story and metaphor to elicit beliefs and nurture the development of teacher identity. Narratives provide rich descriptions of teachers and teaching situations, yielding valuable personal insights to the students. Another powerful tool for unlocking images is the drawing of teaching pictures--pictures of "ideal teachers," pictures of "self-as-teacher," or pictures of teaching contexts.

Why pictures? In their research on images of teachers in popular culture, Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell found that many of the stereotypes and media portrayals of teachers stemmed from fundamental beliefs about teachers and teaching. Weber and Mitchell (1996) used the drawing of pictures as a means of exploring the images held by children, teacher education students and the media.

Because a picture can communicate simultaneously on many levels, drawings are useful not only as iconic images, but also as layered paintings that hide or combine other social, cultural, and personal images. An analysis of drawings can thus reveal aspects of our personal and social knowledge—how we see the world, how we feel, and what we can imagine—that have largely been ignored (Weber & Mitchell, 1996, p. 19).

When music education students are asked to draw their "ideal" teacher, the reaction is predictable. "I'm not an artist," "I really can't draw--at all!" Once

begun, however, the drawing process takes over and even the most primitive stick figures have much to tell the artist about his/her educational theories. The drawings are rich in clues about how the students understand their experience. Details about the teacher's appearance, the choice of teaching context, or, in some cases, the choice to put the teacher in a setting outside classroom practice, can speak volumes about how the individual sees the teaching learning process and the teacher's role in it. When asked to describe their pictures, students create vivid descriptions of the importance of symbols and figures in their pictures. The "artists" become observers of their belief. Drawing and describing pictures, as such, puts personal history in a tangible form for analyzing and making sense of implicit truths and values.

The Sample

150 drawings were elicited from music education students studying at universities and conservatories in Canada, China, and the United States. 20 of the students were enrolled in graduate programmes. 16 of these students were female; 4 were male. 11 were elementary music specialists; the other 9 taught in secondary school settings. The 130 undergraduate students were enrolled in a variety of different programmes, including elementary music, general classroom music, and secondary school instrumental music.

The Drawings

Even though each drawing is as individual as the music education student's experience, common themes emerge across drawings. This is true both within the context of one music education programme and across cultures. These common themes often manifest themselves as stereotypes. In trying to make sense of our world as humans, we often create stereotypes. Sometimes, we consider these stereotypes normative; other times, we treat them as caricature. Whatever the connotation, positive or negative, stereotypes form a basis for beliefs. This holds also for our evolving images of teachers. Margaret Mead, in her 1951 study of schooling in America points out that:

the stereotypes that are prevalent in the popular culture and experience of childhood, play a formative role in the evolution of a teacher's identity, and are part

of the enculturation of teachers into their profession (in Weber and Mitchell, 1995, p. 27).

Gendering Our Teachers

The stereotypical portrayal of teachers included many gendered qualities. The feminization of teaching, particularly with respect to the teaching of young children, is evident. In general music methods classes, the teachers drawn, by male and female students alike, were all female. At the graduate level, only one of four men drew a male "ideal" teacher--Bill's picture is discussed in more detail below. Male teachers are more prevalent in the sample of drawings made by students with an instrumental music specialization. Most of them are portrayed on the podium conducting bands. In this instrumental sample, there were no women portrayed, even by women. This seems to uphold the image of the male band conductor. To date, only one of the drawings made by women depicted a male ideal teacher. "Ann" first drew a stereotypical portrait of a woman teacher in a dress with pearls, sitting behind a desk. When questioned, she noted that she had drawn this picture because she had thought that was what we would expect to see. She then pulled out a second picture of a "jock." This, she explained, was her grade 8 Physical Education teacher with whom she had been deeply infatuated. He became her role model to the extent that later, when she drew her picture of herself as teacher, she was identical in dress and context. The only difference was that this young teacher saw herself as not being "in control" of the class and "losing it", where her ideal had been calm and poised.

While Ann connected her ideal and self-identity to a known and beloved teacher, sometimes the gender portrayals came out of as a lack of role models. A young black male drew a middle-aged white woman as his "ideal" teacher, because he could not remember seeing a black or male role model. His teacher was portrayed as a caring woman helping her students to cross the road safely. More to the point, however, was this same student's portrayal of "self as teacher". His trademark trombone was in the corner of the classroom. He felt that he couldn't properly draw himself, so he traced a figure instead. The figure he had traced was a white male because he couldn't find any pictures of black males that "looked" like teachers.

Other Common Themes

In addition to gender themes, a number of other common themes emerge. These are represented in remarkably similar ways. Among the personal attributes of the "ideal" teacher students have drawn and described:

- a big smile, demonstrating a friendly, happy personality;
- big ears, indicating an attitude toward listening to their students;
- a big, exposed heart to show that they care;
- open, outstretched arms to indicate that they are approachable, welcoming and encouraging;
- "radiation" or squiggly lines, to represent energy or enthusiasm;
- shelves of books, often books of a wide variety of subjects, indicating a broad and deep knowledge;
- a "bag of tricks" that the teacher has close at hand.

There is a difference between portrayals of secondary and elementary classroom contexts. The secondary school classroom is still very much portrayed as a "band rehearsal" with the teacher as conductor at the front of the classroom. The elementary music classroom is more likely to be depicted as a place of creative potential, with many and varied instruments, multiple musical activities and multi-cultural themes in evidence. Does this reflect the way that we as a culture conceive of the curriculum for music education? Where is the evidence of the non-traditional secondary programmes? For many beginning teachers the traditional secondary classroom is still the most vivid memory of their own education. I propose that it is easier to fantasize about a creative, multi-dimensional elementary classroom because in many cases elementary music was not viewed as a musical experience. Most of the drawings of elementary music classrooms represent the enjoyment of music as a goal of music education. Sometimes this is blatant in a written caption "Music is fun." Other times, it is portrayed in the children's smiles and obvious engagement in the musical activity.

Even though there were a number of common ideas expressed, each one of the pictures is as individual in style and content as the "artist" who created it; the product of unique experiences and aspirations. I have chosen four examples that demonstrate some of the common themes listed above,

while showing great detail about the individual's personal theories about teachers and teaching.

Figure 1 shows the portrait of the "ideal" music teacher, drawn by an undergraduate student studying elementary music education. Shiela's drawing portrays a varied approach to music education in that it depicts students involved in singing and shows evidence of instruments involved and discussion as represented by the students with raised hands. The teacher is also using a puppet as a prop in her teaching. In this drawing, we see the "bag of tricks" that many undergraduate students identify as a desired outcome of their music studies. The large smile and posture emanate enthusiasm, while the suit indicates an attitude of traditional professionalism.



Figure 1

In Figure 2, Elsie draws a bright, multicultural classroom, where the children and teacher are actively making music together. The "music is fun" caption over the blackboard expresses Elsie's hopes that the students will enjoy their music class and want to participate. There is evidence of developing music reading skills on the board.

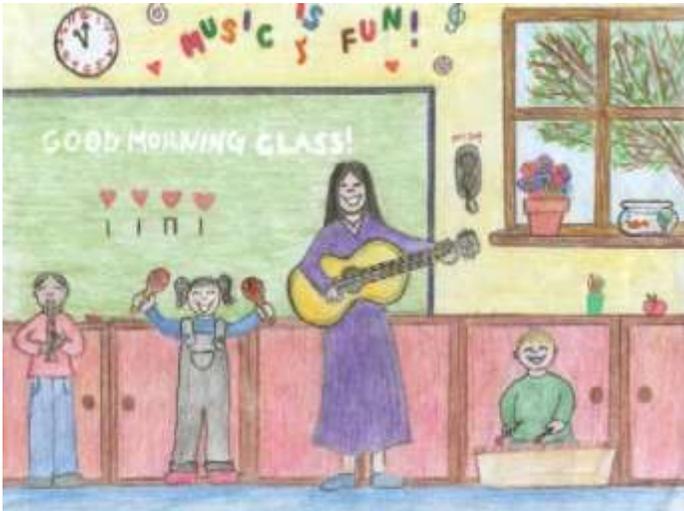


Figure 2

Figure 3 shows the ideal teacher as conceived by Bill, an experienced high school music teacher. Drawn as a cartoon, this portrait depicts many of his beliefs. The teacher is seen metaphorically in the role of the "coach". The hockey game below identifies learning as a team effort, with the coach on the sidelines offering encouragement and urging his team forward. The "game" aspect is further portrayed in the basketball in the teacher's hand. The "Big Book of Every Thing" and the mortarboard on the teacher's head indicate a broad, comprehensive academic knowledge, not just of his subject, but of "everything." In terms of physical attributes, Bill's teacher exhibits the big ears, large, open eyes and big smile that are common to many of the drawings. He wears a superman tie, indicating great strength and superhuman capabilities.

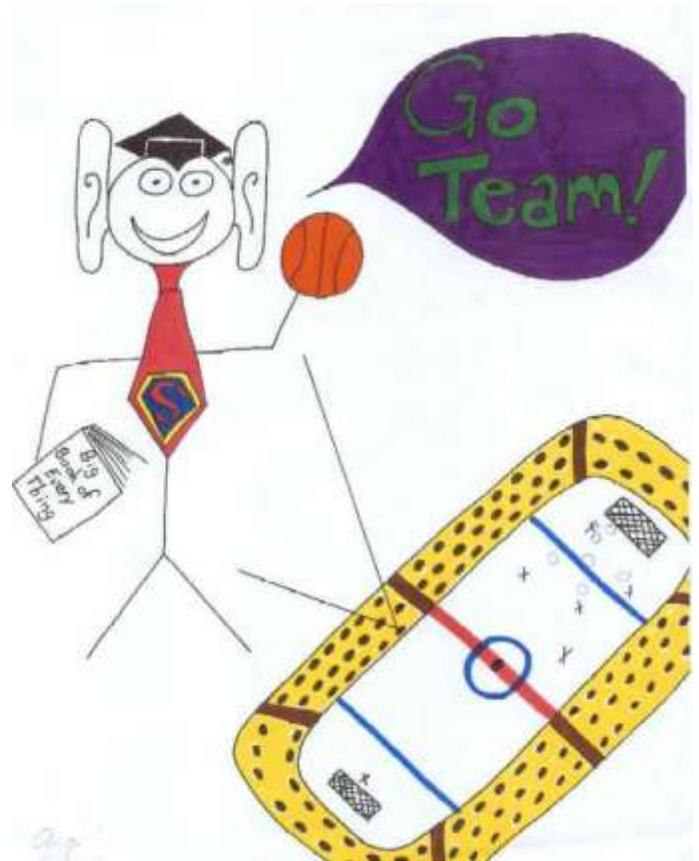


Figure 3

Elizabeth is an experienced elementary school music teacher. Her "ideal" teacher (Figure 4) is depicted in a traditional looking classroom that seems to reflect the importance Elizabeth attaches to good organizational skills. There is a list of expectations on the board, and everything is neatly shelved and labeled. Elizabeth noted that the "Class News" list on the board indicates a caring about the students as individuals. We can see news about everything from a birthday to excitement over a new bike. The teacher herself is portrayed with a visible heart, indicating a sense of caring that is mirrored in the children around her. The lines indicate excitement and energy that emanates outward from the teacher to resonate in the children. The price tag on her dress is meant to symbolize a commitment to dressing professionally and with attention to neat appearance.



Figure 4

Conclusion

Drawing can be a means of making teacher image explicit, and provides an opportunity to "deepen the conversation" with those images. Our images of teachers, and of ourselves as teachers are complex and influential. The work of Michael Connelly, Jean Clandinin and many others stresses the centrality of teacher image to teacher practice.

Teacher actions and practices are expressions of their images. These expressions and images develop continuously through classroom practice and more generally through experience. Images are both the coalescence of past experience and the perspective from which new experience is taken (Clandinin, 1986, p. 173).

It is the images of teachers and teaching built from these years of experience that lead to an individual's image of self-as-teacher or teacher identity. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) caution, however, that identity is not a hard, unchanging reality. Teachers' views of themselves and of their role identity change with the context and with life experience. The use of drawings in beginning music teacher education can evoke a sense of the beliefs

about teachers and teaching that we bring to the teacher education enterprise. Experienced teachers can be given an opportunity to explore the blending of early belief with the evidence accumulated through their on-going teacher practice. The dialogue between these beliefs and the practice of music teaching as taught in music education programmes should be seen as part of the continuing process of "becoming a teacher."

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What pictures would we draw of ourselves and our classrooms? How would these pictures have changed over time? What other types of representations of self and other could be used to engage students' awareness of the belief and value structures they bring to their education?

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