

The Development of Music Teacher Identity in Choral Student Teachers

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Students' progression through teacher concerns appears essential to the development of teacher identity. (Fuller, 1969; Isbell, 2007). Identity formation overall – including, but not solely, teacher identity – is also important, and research suggests possible selves development is vital to identity formation (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Together, teacher concerns and possible selves may provide insight for some of the facets of teacher identity development. The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of choral music student teachers regarding the development of their music teacher identity following self-reported significant teaching events.



Photo Courtesy of John Miller Photography

In order to develop a rich understanding of facets of music teacher identity, this study employed a multiple case study design. Data was to collect data at multiple points during the student teaching experience and included: Responses to 1) the Music Teacher Concerns Questionnaire, 2) Early Teacher Identity Measure, 3) Music Teacher Possible Selves Questionnaire, 4) Interviews and 4) Journal prompts. This project was begun in December 2019 with four participants, and I intended to collect data through the end of the spring student teaching placements. Data were collected before the start of student teaching and halfway through the first student teaching placement. Due to COVID-19, no useable data were collected following week four of the study, and one of the participants was unable to participate. I will report some of the results for the remaining three participants from week zero and week four (using pseudonyms) as well as make some connections to the existing literature.

Results

Kristin

In her week four journal entry, Kristin felt as though she was floundering concerning confidence in teaching. Similarly, her *Early Teacher Identity Measure (ETIM)* (strength of teacher identity) dipped from 4.53 before student teaching to 4.00 (out of 5). The drop (higher = stronger identity) score appeared to reflect a drop in statements related to confidence in ability. Additionally, there was an increase (lower = less concerned) in teacher concerns from 1.67 before student teaching to 3.80 (out of 5). Specifically, there was an increase in teacher concerns

related to competence. Interestingly, with all the talk of competence, she still saw her strongest possible self as a competent teacher, and her most feared self was an incompetent teacher.

Samantha

The most significant events at the end of week four for Samantha were her least effective lessons (Lack of classroom control, poor pacing), which she attributed to the fact that she was teaching out of her specialization. Her *ETIM* scores dropped from 4.29 to 3.81 and the largest contributors to this drop seemed to be a lack of progress in teaching ability and not feeling she was a natural teacher. There was also a slight increase in teacher concerns from 2.60 to 2.80. The most notable increases were in classroom management and all items relating to student concerns. Within possible selves, during the initial interview, the possible and feared selves were jobs (e.g., DCA and elementary teacher); however, in week four, while possible selves were still jobs, feared selves were characteristics (e.g., feared becoming a gossip and being judgmental).

Mary

During the initial interview, Mary had indicated that weaknesses she identified in the *ETIM* and the strong teacher concerns were related to her not having been in a classroom. In her week four reflection, she commented on a strong experience at a retreat with the students that kick-started her transition from student to teacher. Her *ETIM* in week 4 increased from 4.65 to 4.80, and her teacher concerns decreased from 3.53 to 2.20, which seemed to match her increase in confidence. Most of her possible and feared selves were characteristics (e.g., saw herself as a mentor and feared becoming burnt-out) and did not change much from week zero to week four.

Applications for Teaching

- Preliminary results, though not generalizable, suggest that providing opportunities – in field experiences or student teaching – that are positive may help the pre-service teacher develop relationships with the students and strengthen the pre-service teacher's confidence and reduce their concerns.
- While this study focused on pre-service teachers, it is likely that providing in-service teachers with opportunities for positive teacher experience may also improve their confidence and reduce their teaching concerns.

References

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