

# PGCE music students' perceptions of the benefits of their musical involvement outside of school

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This study aims to assess the perceived impact of PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate in Education) music students' engagement in music making outside of school. It specifically attempts to uncover teacher trainees' attitudes toward their own music making, what kind of musical activities they are involved in, how they perceive these activities in terms of their value in their lives, their possible impact on the quality of their teaching, and the perceived satisfaction they get from their teaching as a result of their own musical engagement outside of school. Thirty-four music teacher trainees in secondary education were asked to report on the perceived impact that their participation in music making outside school had on their lives during their training and on its expected impact as a qualified music teacher. It was found that being musically involved outside of school has both personal and professional benefits for them: it increases their job satisfaction and helps them become better teachers. They all expressed a desire to be involved in such musical activities as qualified music teachers because they felt that these can help them maintain their enthusiasm, be more confident and motivated, and keep their technique and performance standards at a high level.

*Keywords:* music teachers; music making; impact of musical activity; job satisfaction; professional development

Following Bransford and Brown's (2000) description, Mills (2004) argues that former-teachers ["performers for whom instrumental (including vocal) teaching is integral to their professional identity"] are "accomplished novices" rather than "answer-filled experts" who are highly motivated to develop their teaching expertise, learn from their teaching activity, and transfer this knowledge into the performing context to help their further development as performers.

This study seeks to address a related question: do extra-school musical activities of teachers affect their teaching positively? Is there, therefore, a similar but opposite trend in this case?

Recently there has been some recognition in the music teacher education field of the rich professional lives that many music teachers enjoy in their music making and music teaching, and of the effective and satisfying career that this may often lead to. In a national survey carried out in the USA, the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) reports that out of the 453 public elementary music specialists who responded to the survey, 83% had an active performing role as a soloist or with an ensemble.

Bernard's research (2004) sheds some light on how music teachers who are also performing musicians speak about their work in terms of the relationship between these two professional activities. She also argues that, until the beginning of the twenty-first century, the active and diverse musical lives that music teachers often have outside of school were largely ignored in the music education literature, even though many music teachers must have been highly accomplished musicians to get the appropriate music teaching qualification.

Drummond (2001) found that trainee music teachers considered musical enthusiasm to be the most essential quality in a music teacher. How can musical enthusiasm in teaching be developed and maintained? In the same study, extra-curricular, GCSE, and A-level classes were generally approached with higher levels of enthusiasm than non-examination KS3 (Key Stage 3) and KS4 classes. As Drummond (2001) explains, music students and teachers continue to derive the highest satisfaction from those aspects of school life where they had themselves discovered it in their own school days.

When asked to provide their views on music in school, 8-14 year old pupils identified playing instruments as one of their most favorite aspects, in addition to having the opportunity to have contact with "real" professional musicians (Lamont *et al.* 2003). This is an interesting finding that ties in well with the proposed research, which hypothesizes that musically active teachers could themselves provide this kind of "real" professional musician role model to their students.

The main aim of this study is to assess the perceived impact of PGCE music students' engagement in music making outside of school. In particular, it aims to explore their attitudes toward their current and possible future involvement in such musical activities regarding specifically any possible effects these may have on the quality of their teaching and their job satisfaction.

## METHOD

### Participants

Thirty-four music teacher trainees in secondary education were asked to report on the perceived impact that their participation in music making outside school had on their lives during their training and on its expected impact as a qualified music teacher.

### Materials

They were presented with the following questions:

- Are you involved in music making outside school? (Please specify the musical style and genre.)
- What other kinds of musical activities have you been involved in the past?
- Does your musical involvement outside school help you in any way? Personally? Professionally? In what way?
- Does it increase your job satisfaction in any way? How?
- Does it help you become a better teacher? If so, how?
- Do you see yourself continuing to be involved in such musical activities outside school as a qualified music teacher? Do you think it is important or not?

### Procedure

The data collected were then analyzed using the software package Atlas.ti. The questionnaires were subject to in-depth qualitative analysis based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in line with Smith (1995).

## RESULTS

Trainees mentioned the *social* benefits they feel can be gained from their participation in music making activities outside of school. More than half of the participants appreciated the development of social skills, the social interaction opportunities, the development of friendships while spending time with like-minded people, and the active social life that traveling to perform in various events often entails. On a social level, therefore, music making was perceived as an important social activity which helps build relationships with peers.

Benefits on a *personal* level expressed by participants included a sense of achievement and self-fulfillment, as well as feelings of being useful and

musically satisfied. Music making was also perceived as an important means of self expression, as a relaxing and therapeutic activity which helps improve self-confidence, generates happy and positive feelings, is enjoyable but also helps participants enjoy and appreciate life more. On a purely personal level, therefore, some participants viewed their musical involvement as an enjoyable and “creative outlet,” albeit a challenging one, which can provide release from pressures of work.

I need it to feel happy and content.

Comments on personal development also included the musical benefits that most participants felt can be gained from such musical involvement. They thought that it can help them develop their own musicianship and interpretation of music, keeps their playing and technical standard high, helps them improve their knowledge of repertoire of different styles and genres, and therefore increases subject knowledge and keeps musical ideas fresh and up to date.

It is interesting to notice that most of these comments on musical benefits were often accompanied by their implications on classroom teaching. Therefore, in addition to having an effect on personal development, these musical gains were highly appreciated for their benefits on the actual teaching and learning environment. In other words, the skills developed can lead to more confidence in teaching by being able to incorporate more varied activities and skillfully demonstrate different techniques in class.

Keeps playing/performing standard high, leading to more confidence at school.

On a *professional* level, respondents emphasized the positive effects of their active musical involvement outside of school on their ability to teach and their pupils’ learning. By acquiring more relevant knowledge and experience through their own personal development, they felt able to address better pupils’ diverse needs as they had the opportunity to share ideas and discuss resources with fellow musicians, further develop their communication skills, and draw links between classroom music with wider music making.

Interestingly, they felt that their musical experiences often enable them to act as role models for the students and develop higher expectations both from themselves and pupils’ work. Even though they set higher standards in teaching and learning, some respondents felt that they can also adopt a more relaxing attitude toward class teaching. More general professional benefits

were also expressed regarding, for instance, how these musical achievements can look good on a CV.

Helps me relate music in the classroom to other aspects of music. Ideas used in other musical activities can be used in practical teaching.

Almost all participants in the study (32 of 34) felt that their active musical involvement outside school helps them become better teachers mainly because of their own confidence, enthusiasm, and musical experiences that can be passed on to pupils to inspire and motivate them.

Yes, because I learn lots of skills which I can pass on to pupils. By talking about my achievements, it might inspire other pupils.

These trainees, therefore, felt that such musical activities increase their job satisfaction, make them happier, more energetic, and most importantly, help them focus on the personal significance of choosing music teaching as a career. All participants expressed the desire to be actively involved in music making outside of school as qualified music teachers.

Helps me to focus on why I'm teaching music in the first place.

## DISCUSSION

The study's findings interestingly draw a kind of ideal image of the classroom music teacher in secondary education. The variety of qualities and attributes mentioned depict a happy, enthusiastic, confident, and knowledgeable music teacher who can inspire, motivate, and help pupils achieve. These are highly accomplished musicians who recently graduated with their music degree and music making forms a significant part of their identity. They could be called "teacher-performers," following Mill's (2004) description of "performer-teachers." They are, in other words, teachers for whom performing is integral to their professional identity. They hope to continue making music as qualified music teachers as they feel that a variety of benefits can result from such involvement both for their own good and for the improvement of the teaching and learning environment.

The research findings indicate, therefore, that music teachers' musical involvement outside of school could possibly help address a number of problematic issues identified in the music education literature, such as avoiding burnout and having clear career goals (Hamann *et al.* 1987), maintaining

musical enthusiasm (Drummond 2001), and allowing pupils to view their teachers as “real” professional musicians (Lamont *et al.* 2003). Finally, the lack of congruence between “school music” and “out of school music” (Hargreaves and Marshall 2003) or between the identities and attitudes of pupils and teachers (Hargreaves *et al.* 2003) could be reduced.

This research needs to be further explored and validated by future research that will shed light on the relevant attitudes of qualified and more experienced music teachers to find out whether a similar trend continues to exist.

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