

MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE, MUSICAL IDENTITY, AND THE GENERALIST TEACHER: VICKI'S STORY

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ABSTRACT. In this paper the generalist teacher is conceptualized as inherently musical, holding unarticulated musical knowledge and awaiting educative practices that give concrete form to and expand that knowledge. The paper describes how "Vicki", a generalist teacher with no formal musical training and minimal musical experiences, comes to recognize her own musicality and to believe herself capable of teaching music in her elementary classroom. In presenting the "emic" view, excerpts from Vicki's journal are used to illustrate how she comes to know what musicians know, to think like musicians think, and in the process begins to fashion a musical identity for herself. Vicki's story has implications for the musical formation of generalist elementary teachers because it raises questions about how the teaching profession defines musical knowledge, what it means to be musical, and who is qualified to claim musicianship.

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, le professeur généraliste est conceptualisé comme étant fondamentalement musical, comme détenant des connaissances musicales non articulées et comme attendant des méthodes éducatives qui donnent corps à ces connaissances et les étoffent. Cet article décrit comment Vicki, professeur généraliste sans formation musicale structurée et possédant une expérience minimale de la musique, en vient à reconnaître sa propre musicalité et à se juger capable d'enseigner la musique à ses élèves du primaire. Pour présenter un point de vue "émique", on s'est servi d'extraits du journal de Vicki pour illustrer comment elle en vient à savoir ce que connaissent les musiciens, à penser comme pensent les musiciens et à commencer à se forger une identité musicale propre. L'histoire de Vicki a des implications pour la formation musicale des professeurs généralistes du primaire car elle soulève des questions sur la façon dont la profession d'enseignant définit les connaissances musicales, ce que signifie être mélomane et que est qualifié pour se prétendre musicien.

There is a perception that the arts are the domain of the specially trained. This is particularly so in the case of music where a certain mystique is attached to its symbol system, which is not the case for art

(Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991). One generalist teacher put it this way: "I would fare better in teaching art. I don't think it's as rigid as music can be, as exact. I can be more flexible in art" (Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, p.311).

Musical knowledge and the teaching of music are held by many to be the purview of the specialist. Yet, it is argued, most members of a population have innate musical talent (Gardner, 1983; Russell, in press; Sloboda, 1991). If this is so, the distribution of musical talent among generalist teachers can be no different from its distribution among the rest of the population, and there is no reason to suppose that generalist teachers cannot draw on that talent to create interesting and rewarding musical experiences in their classrooms. Institutions engaged in the training of music specialists and education generalists may structure their programs around assumptions of exclusivity (Campbell & Burdell, 1996) if they do not recognize or value the presence of musical ability among the general population. Schools of music reinforce an exclusive view when they isolate their specialist students from the educational mainstream and focus on the acquisition of the disciplinary knowledge of music apart from the larger educational contexts in which children learn. Schools of education reinforce that view when they do not provide their generalist teachers with courses in music curriculum and instruction. Music thus may remain a mystery, penetrable only by the specially trained.

The absence of music specialists in schools is sometimes assumed to mean that children are not experiencing music in their classrooms. This is sometimes an unstated research assumption (Dorman, 1994) and reflects a belief that the school that does not have a music specialist is a school in which no music learning takes place. Research suggests that generalist student teachers as well as practicing teachers have little confidence in their musicianship (Barnes & Shinn-Taylor, 1988; Mills, 1989, 1995/96; Wragg, Bennett, & Carre, 1989). Adverse comments about generalist teachers' capacity to respond positively to musical training contribute to the notion that musical knowledge and skills are specialist domains. This attitude does little to help change the self-perceptions of generalist teachers. One study that investigated the knowledge bases of generalist teachers (Bennett & Turner-Bissett, 1993) referred to the teachers as "nonmusicians," but it did not refer to them as nonscientists or nonmathematicians. One could be forgiven for interpreting nonmusical as a pejorative description. If generalist teachers view themselves as non musicians, and have the perception that they are viewed by the educational community as nonmusicians, it is

not surprising that many are reluctant to engage in music-making with their students.

The claim that generalist student teachers and primary teachers lack confidence in their own musicianship is borne out by my experience teaching music to generalist teachers. In my classes I challenge the assumptions of students who claim that they lack musicianship by providing them with musical experiences that bring to their consciousness the tacit knowledge of music that they hold. My assumption is that they hold tacit knowledge derived from exposure in their everyday lives to the music in their environments and that what they lack is consciousness of what counts as musical knowledge, and tools to use that knowledge in teaching situations. Through discussion, focused listening, performance, and the preparation and delivery of lesson plans, students build an articulated musical vocabulary that gives form to their tacitly-held knowledge and they begin to recognize and identify musical concepts and to develop skills. By these processes they gather the tools that will allow them to use their knowledge to teach music in their classrooms should they so desire.

Mills' (1995/96) study of the musicianship of generalist student teachers attempted to identify knowledge that generalists could acquire during twenty hours of music study. It adopted a view of musical knowledge as competencies that could be measured, counted, and evaluated. Musical competencies in Mills' study included making musical judgments, knowing the names of notes, demonstrating simple performance skills on an instrument, being able to recognize a musical work, and so forth. Mills was able to compare the competencies of generalist teachers with the competencies of specialist teachers and with the competencies of children of school age. One of the findings was that generalist teachers' posttest scores were significantly higher than their pretest scores on a number of test items. Studies that measure and compare musical competencies are important for they capture the "etic" view, the perspective of the observer. Things are seen from the outside looking in. This paper seeks to view from inside, the "emic" view, the view from the actors themselves.

There is a growing research interest in generalist elementary teachers as providers of musical experiences in classrooms. Qualitative studies have approached the idea from a variety of perspectives. Descriptive studies have captured some of the types of musical activities that take place in elementary classrooms (Bresler, in press; Stake, Bresler, & Mabry, 1991). However, studies that investigate what generalist teach-

ers know, what they can learn, and how they view their own musical knowledge, ability, and potential as teachers of music also need to be undertaken. Understandings gained from such inquiries can help teachers of generalist students to consider how they can design for student teachers that are not formally trained music courses that are responsive to their needs.

This paper arises from a desire to discover the ways in which student teachers' perceptions of their musical abilities, of their musical knowledge, and of their potential as teachers of music become transformed through the experience of structured encounters with music. It speaks through the voice of Vicki, a preservice generalist student teacher, thus capturing an "emic" view, the perspective of the actor. In contrast to inquiries that seek to identify competencies and test the effects of instruction, this inquiry seeks a view from the inside looking out. The paper traces Vicki's journey from panic and uncertainty to confidence. It shows how she began the course with a determination to bring music into her elementary classroom regardless of her belief that she lacked the requisite knowledge and in spite of her feelings of shame at what she perceived as her lack of ability. The paper shows how education helped Vicki come to think of herself as a musical person and as a potential music teacher. The source of the data and the inspiration for this paper is Vicki's journal, which she wrote during a 13-week course entitled "Musical Instruments in the Classroom", which was designed and taught by the writer.

THE SETTING

"Musical Instruments in the Classroom" was an elective course for elementary generalist students, offered at the Faculty of Education, McGill University. Except for a few students who had taken piano lessons as children, most of the members of the class had had no formal training in music. However, during class discussions and in their written dialogue journals, all expressed a belief in the importance of music in the lives of school children. All expressed a desire to learn how musical instruments could be incorporated into musical activities in their elementary classrooms. The students had three main assignments: 1) to assemble a resource file of music, activities, and lesson plans suitable for classroom use; 2) to prepare and teach a music lesson to their peers; and 3) to reflect, in journals, on music teaching, music learning, and the role of music in their own lives and in the lives of school children.

Vicki's Story

No length was specified for the journals, and entries could be made at the student's discretion. The focus of the journal was loosely prescribed as follows: "Discuss, interpret, and reflect on the musical ideas and activities experienced in class and how they relate to your own experience. The journal should demonstrate your ability to explore critically how the various ideas and approaches to teaching music are relevant to your own interests, values, knowledge, experience, and expectations as a preservice teacher."

Vicki's Journal

Vicki's journal was chosen for this paper because she wrote reflectively, frequently, and at length, and she kept her musical experiences as her focus. It revealed her growing understanding of musical concepts known already at an intuitive level but not previously identified and labeled, and it showed her pleasure at her developing aural skills. Vicki placed her new musical experiences and articulated knowledge into past, present, and future frameworks: her childhood (lack of) musical experiences, the attitudes (negative) towards music held by teachers whom she encountered during her field experience as a preservice teacher, and the structure she would implement in her own future classroom. I asked Vicki if she would be willing to read from her journal at a symposium organized in February 1996 at McGill's Faculty of Education on "Music Teaching in the Elementary Classroom: Specialist and Generalist Perspectives". I thought that her "story", describing how she began to become aware of her musical knowledge and skills that she could use to incorporate musical activities in her elementary classroom would be of interest to the symposium audience made up of specialist and generalist teachers, preservice teachers, and teacher educators. After giving the matter some thought, Vicki declined to make a presentation in person, but offered me the full use of her journal if I wished to use it to prepare a paper to capture the voice of a generalist preservice teacher.¹

VICKI'S BACKGROUND AS MOTIVATION. At the start of the semester Vicki reflected in her journal on the absence of music in her own school life:

Being in class today really made me think about the little music background that I have and how much I want to broaden it. We were asked why we chose this class and I had so many reasons racing through my mind. Perhaps the most important reason is that I, as a teacher, want to provide my students the musical experience I was somehow denied throughout my entire education. Music class just never really existed for me in either elementary or secondary school.

She continues:

I don't know how my schools were able to get away with completely ignoring music or why they ever did. I do, however, remember the piano that sat in the kindergarten classroom, collecting dust. Never once do I recall hearing it being played.

A single musical experience with a student teacher who came to her Grade 5 class emphasized the absence of music in Vicki's school life and left an imprint on her memory. Speaking of the student teacher, Vicki reflects:

. . . once she realized that music just wasn't part of our curriculum, she decided to do something about it. She took it upon herself to bring music into our classroom at least three times a week, and I still remember how much we as a class began to enjoy music. Little things like playing a tape while we were doing art, or just taking the time to teach us a new song, instead of making us sing the same song year after year at the Christmas concert, it made our days a little more cheerful.

The realization that the student teacher was leaving signaled the end of musical experiences. Using a poignant metaphor, Vicki recalls the feeling of desolation:

She only stayed for a little over a month and when she left I think everyone dreaded the silence that now came back to invade our classroom. She was gone and she had taken our newly discovered love of music with her. It was back to the old routine where music was just a piano collecting dust in the corner of a room.

That brief musical experience with a temporary teacher brought to Vicki's consciousness music's potential to play a meaningful role in her life. It led to her resolution to provide musical experiences for her students:

My students will not be denied the experience of having music every week in class, like I myself was throughout elementary school. I want to give my future students the opportunity to explore music in as many different ways as I am capable of bringing it into the classroom.

Her resolution was guided by her belief that

. . . children need music, just as they need math, spelling, and reading. Music gives children a forum to express themselves and children today need to express themselves more than anything. The arts provide them with such opportunities.

A QUESTION OF CONFIDENCE? Vicki's observations during her practice teaching bears out research claims that many primary teachers lack confi-

dence in their ability to teach music. She did not understand why classroom teachers believed that students could only experience music if a specialist was present. Nor did she understand their reluctance to respond to students' eagerness to experience music:

They seemed to think that music could only occur in the school if the music teacher was there. I still don't understand why teachers are so scared of having a music lesson in their classroom once in a while. These students seem to love music as much as art and gym class, and they took complete advantage of every single second they had in the music room. It was so easy to see how much they enjoyed music that it was rather sad to accept that they could only have it every two weeks.

Although she believed that music was important and although she wanted to give her students musical experiences, Vicki had reservations about her own musical abilities. In her journal she used words like panic, fright, and worry to describe her concerns. She confessed:

I was quite ashamed to admit in the beginning that I had very little music in me. . . .

BEHAVING LIKE A MUSICIAN. Musical behaviour includes behaving like performers – doing things that performers do. One of the things they do is to produce particular sounds at particular points in time, in particular ways, in concert with other performers. Vicki discovered that she loved the collaborative aspect of performance:

I had a great deal of fun in music class today, since we created ourselves a little piece of music on the spot with different instruments. I especially liked trying out the drums for the first time, although I was a little nervous at being in charge of keeping the rhythm going. I really enjoy the class when we do such activities as a class. I was especially proud of the different musical creations we put together when we played as a class. It sounded pretty good to me! I was simply amazed at how quickly we came together to create a small part of what would have been a piece of music if we had continued.

Performance experience as a conductor allowed her to discover the significance of gesture as a means of musical communication:

In class today we also experienced how to get the entire "orchestra" to begin and stop on the exact same note. I had a great time being the conductor, since I find that it's only through doing something that you learn. I had a little bit of difficulty in deciding what my signal would be to start off slowly, but I got the hang of it after trying a few times with the cooperation of other classmates. I never knew it was so difficult to start and stop a few musicians. It can be quite challenging since there has to be a good communication through signals between the conductor and the performing musicians.

Public performance was an activity that she felt provided a valuable way for students to experience a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, she recognized the necessity of dealing with the debilitating effects of performance nerves and she sought to understand how she, as a teacher, could help students overcome nervousness during performances. She recalls an incident during her practice teaching days:

Unfortunately the entire class caught a bad case of stage fright just before their presentation and they merely mumbled the song, which was rather disappointing when I knew how well they had performed it over and over in class during practice. That is something I hope to learn out of taking this class. How to get your students to be proud of their voices or their talent and not be embarrassed to share it with others.

THINKING LIKE A MUSICIAN. Thinking like a musician is different from thinking like a chef or a physicist. Thinking like a musician involves perceiving musical sounds and organizing and interpreting them within some sort of musical framework. It involves using the terminology that musicians use and realizing that a term such as volume has a different connotation in music than it does in cooking or in physics. It involves being able to identify what is taking place in the music one hears, being able to discriminate between different musical concepts, devices and practices, and applying appropriate verbal labels.

Around mid-semester Vicki began to notice that she was listening to music differently and that she was starting to become interested in styles of music that had not hitherto interested her. She was expanding her musical knowledge, and she was conscious that she was doing so. She writes:

I'm glad that over the semester I have discovered music and have developed a new way of listening to it. I sometimes catch myself listening to music in a different way, trying to distinguish the instruments playing, counting the beats, listening for timbre, looking for Ostinatos, etc. I also would have never pictured myself in the Classical Music section at HMV, but there I was a few weeks ago buying my very first classical music album.

Thinking like a musician also involves thinking about the qualitative aspects of performance. This involves developing the critical faculties which assist one along the path to "connoisseurship". Vicki noted the importance of unanimity in performance:

I . . . realized how if one person is off, then the piece of music will sound entirely different and 'off.'

She reflected on the element of time, as a function of performance,

It must be so difficult to be part of an orchestra and know when to come in at all the right moments. I still don't know how they can complete entire pieces of music one after the other, and never miss a beat.

and she became conscious of the role of the conductor:

I now finally understand what the conductor does. For me, I always wondered what he was doing, or what he was swinging at with that little wand. I knew that he started everyone off at the same time, or pointed to them when they were supposed to come in, but after that I just couldn't figure out what all that swinging was all about. Now it all makes sense that he is keeping the beats so that if some get mixed up, they can count on him for knowing what beat the piece is at. He does serve a purpose after all!

Musicians use musical terms to talk about musical concepts and devices. As the semester progressed, Vicki began to identify musical concepts and devices and to incorporate them into her thinking and into her actions. She learned the appropriate terms and she used them to talk about music. Having musical terminology allowed her to talk about musical things and gave verbal form to her musical thinking (Russell, 1995). Having a musical vocabulary allowed her to talk like musicians talk:

I'm also glad that I'm getting used to the terminology used in music, a little more each week. I'm beginning to finally understand the differences between what a beat and a rhythm is . . . I enjoyed playing the Ostinatos in class, and that is the sort of activity that I see children enjoying.

DEMISTIFYING NOTATION. Early in the course Vicki began the process of demystifying musical notation. An introduction to a simple, nontraditional notational scheme led to excitement at her discovery of the principles underlying the relation of the written symbol to sound:

We also learnt to write our own musical scores and perform them, which I'm really enjoying. I can't believe how simple it is to understand.

She discovered how duration could be represented in written symbolic form through a group performance of a poem accompanied by instrumental sounds:

I was rather surprised at how specific the instructions were, since it told you where exactly to begin playing an instrument and exactly where to stop.

Musical notation began to lose its mystique:

I guess I will no longer be terrified of those music sheets with long musical scores and all those different notes. I have confidence that I will leave this class at the end of the semester and finally understand everything there is to know about writing and reading music.

Half way through the course, fortified with new knowledge and insight, Vicki reflected on the role of music in her life and on the value of being musically educated:

Music continues to play an important role in my life, and the more I learn about it, the more important it becomes.

THINKING LIKE A MUSIC TEACHER. Just as a science teacher teaches towards science objectives, a music teacher teaches towards music objectives. Music objectives are distinct from other kinds of objectives: they are derived from the musical elements of pitch, duration, volume and timbre, and the ways in which they may be combined to create musical meaning. As Vicki built her music resource file, she began to realize the role of music materials and plans in the implementation of lessons having musical objectives:

The resource file that I am working on for this course is exposing me to a lot of music material that I definitely can use in my own classes later on. I am enjoying the process of flipping through music books and reading about the different activities or units that a music class can focus on.

Vicki began to see herself as a person having the potential to design and implement a lesson having musical objectives. This became clear to her during the process of preparing and teaching a 25-minute class to her peers. She incorporated what she had understood about notation into her music teaching module in an inventive way. She fashioned a large bristol board clock face and used coloured cutouts of various shapes to show the types of sounds she wanted to hear. A movable second hand, travelling in clockwise movement, indicated when the players should start and stop performing their sounds. Her confidence in her potential to teach music grew quickly:

At first I remembered how stressed everyone felt at the prospect of having to teach for half an hour, but now I see that everyone seemed to have taken advantage of the opportunity. It was the first time that I presented a music lesson, and it was definitely a good experience to remember. The idea of having to present this lesson got easier to accept as the semester went by, since I seemed to become more confident with my musical abilities. I can remember the feeling of panic at the beginning of the semester when I thought about having to present, and then the week suddenly arrived so quickly, and there was no problem whatsoever. It got to the point that I just knew that I was ready to present and that there would be no problems.

At the end of the semester, Vicki reflected upon her musical journey of the previous thirteen weeks:

Although I was quite ashamed to admit in the beginning that I had very little music in me, I'm glad that over the semester I have discovered music and have developed a new way of listening to it. I sometimes catch myself listening to music in a different way, trying to distinguish the instruments playing, counting the beats, listening for timbre, looking for Ostinatos, etc.

One has a sense that music is going to play an important role in Vicki's life as a teacher.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Vicki's writing reveals her values: love, commitment, and belief. It reveals her love of children and of music, a commitment to teaching, and a belief that music is important in the school life of the child. It also reveals what Vicki was able to learn in a short period of time about fundamental aspects of music that would serve as a foundation for her construction of her identity as a musical person and as a teacher capable of teaching music. It traces her journey from feelings of panic and inadequacy to assumptions of competence – thinking like musicians think and seeing herself as a potential teacher of music in the elementary classroom. It is clear that Vicki began the course with unarticulated musical knowledge – knowledge of which she was not aware. What she needed in order to transform that view of herself were musical tools such as vocabulary, concepts, repertoires of music and ideas for musical activities, and lesson plans whose objectives were musical.

Vicki's experience highlights the importance of attending to what we teach in music classes, how we teach it, and to whom we are teaching. Although we cannot give students such as Vicki a love of music, a commitment to teaching, or a belief that music is important, we can provide the tools they need to do the work they want to do. Giving generalist teachers tools permits them to venture beyond recreational singing, although this is not unimportant. It enables them to plan and carry out activities that have musically educational purposes.

Vicki's is not an uncommon story. Embedded in many of my students' journals were similar voyages from uncertainty, arising from a belief that they lacked specialized knowledge, to a confidence in their musical abilities. Speaking about generalist student teachers, a colleague once remarked to me, "They don't know anything. They don't even know what a dotted quarter is." Many of my students did not know what a dotted quarter was, but they knew a great deal about music. They simply did not know what they knew. This investigation suggests that generalist

students hold a wealth of tacit musical knowledge, internalized from their exposure to music in the environment. If we will listen to their voices they will tell us what they know and what they hold to be valuable. These voices are accessible in part through students' journal writing; if we pay attention to what they are saying we may find out where students are situated in terms of what they know musically. We may come to understand that non-formally-trained students can:

- Become aware of their knowledge through various forms of musical experience including structured listening and participation in performance-based activities;
- Build a musical vocabulary that gives form to their knowledge;
- Build repertoires of music and related activities that they can use in classrooms; and,
- Learn how to apply their knowledge of music and music teaching in the classroom.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

The challenge for teacher educators is to develop methods of discovering what generalist teachers know and what they can do in the domain of music. Analyzing students' journals is one path to discovering what they know and value. Music teacher educators can create teaching approaches that are designed to reveal to generalist students their own musical talents and knowledge, to help them to develop those talents and to articulate that knowledge. Vicki's journal suggests that education can transform in positive ways how generalist teachers view musical knowledge and the teaching of music. All students have musical knowledge. Telling stories of students such as Vicki can guide teachers of generalists as they create experiences for their students that will help them to discover more fully what they already know, to give form to their musical knowledge, and to expand that knowledge. This is one value of narrative in educational research and the value of Vicki's story within the narrative genre.

NOTE

1. The writer wishes to acknowledge the contribution of "Vicki" (a pseudonym) towards the development of this paper. Vicki's journal entries are quoted as she wrote them, except for some minor alterations to facilitate reading.

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ERRATA

In the references following Morris and Leblanc's paper, *Multiple Intelligences: Profiling dominant intelligences of grade eight children*, published in this journal, Vol. 31 No. 2, the second author (J.P. Dionne) was omitted in the first two listings on page 138. They should have been printed as:

Morris, C., & Dionne, J.P. (1993b, June). *A qualitative analysis of Gardner's dimensions for intermediate students*. Paper presented at the 21st annual meeting of The Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Carleton University, Ottawa.

Morris, C., & Dionne, J.P. (1993c, December). *Perceived cognitive interests by grade eight pupils within Howard Gardner's framework*. Paper presented at the 35th annual meeting of The Ontario Educational Research Council, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Ontario. (ONTERIS Microfiche Reproduction Service No. 95-05970).