

Was my dad a musician?... and why does this matter to teacher education?

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ABSTRACT

Through an exploration of how far one can define oneself as a musician, and focusing on the author's father as an example, this paper examines the 'level' of specialism and subject knowledge a secondary classroom music teacher in England requires in order to teach effectively and authoritatively. This discussion is then extended to other curriculum areas and whether there is a difference in the practitioner identity and knowledge of teachers from a range of different subjects which may impact on their confidence to teach. The paper concludes that, whilst many may define themselves as musician, scientist, mathematician, historian, etc, the breadth of subject knowledge held by each (eg my father) may not be sufficient for them to pursue teaching in the classroom (ie beyond teaching as specialist peripatetic) as a career option.

INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper may seem a little unusual for a journal which focuses on research and its findings. Research and research data are certainly referenced as the foundation for some of the hypotheses presented, but the focus is more upon how this data provides the basis for the more reflective and ethnographic nature of this paper. As a result of the focus just described, another academic convention will be dispensed with for much of the text: rather than the impersonal characteristic which is traditionally

a feature of such a paper, the author will make use of writing in the first person. There is some biographical and autobiographical reflection below which suggests the appropriateness of such an approach.

My father, George, who died in 2017, was passionate about music: most of it being that genre we traditionally term 'classical music'. However, he was not a performer in any sense of the word, nor did he devise music. He could not read music or play a musical instrument; he would not have called himself a singer. The

KEYWORDS

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Oxford Dictionary of English (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003) (OED) defines a musician as someone 'who plays a musical instrument or composes music, especially as a profession'. In Dalladay (2014), however, the author goes further and defines a musician as someone who engages actively with music (performing, composing, active listening), though they will also have participated in some further training/education/in-depth practice in order to more fully develop their potential to be 'musical' and an expression of their 'musicality'. This is a much broader definition. My father, as has

been stated already, was no performer or composer but he was a highly active listener. His knowledge of a wide range of music that he enjoyed and listened to grew over the years through the broadening of repertoire, appreciating a wide range of ‘classical’ (and some aspects of other genres: he possessed for example, a copy of the Pink Floyd record *Dark Side of the Moon*), and reading about the music he developed an interest in. By the definition of a musician laid out in the OED, George was not a musician and by the definition proposed by Dalladay, perhaps, he was.

TO BE A MUSICIAN: MUSICAL COMPETENCIES

In 2011–12, I was working on doctoral research with music teacher trainees and their experienced music teacher-mentors in a selection of secondary schools across London, and, as part of this, my participants and I, through an examination of the literature and a discussion of experience, agreed 12 competencies of what it is to be a musician – at least in part or development. These were then used as a basis for some of the subsequent research (Dalladay, 2014, pp. 41–2; presented in no particular sequence):

1. the ability to perform on a musical instrument with confidence and appropriate technique (MENC, 1984; Fletcher, 1989; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2002; Lamont, 2002; Rogers, 2002; Müllensiefen *et al.*, 2011)
2. the ability to develop original, imaginative compositions (Rousseau, 1779; Paynter, 1982; Hargreaves, 1986; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Swanwick, 1988)
3. the ability to improvise with confidence (Paynter, 1982; MENC, 1984; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Thompson & Lehmann, 2004)
4. the ability to use musical terminology in appraising music (Pflederer, 1964; MENC, 1984; QCA, 2007)
5. the ability to read from staff notation fluently (MENC, 1984; Fletcher, 1989; Maxwell Davies in Ward, 2007; DfE, 2013)
6. the ability to sing with accurate intonation (MENC, 1984; Hallam, 2006; Welch, 2006; DfE, 2013)
7. the ability to use ICT to develop and enhance musical ‘events’ (Kemp, 1996; Wise *et al.*, 2011; Savage, 2012)
8. the ability to perform music ‘by ear’ (Pflederer, 1964; Green, 2002; Glennie, 2003)
9. the ability to harmonise melodies applying stylistic conventions (Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Edexcel, 2012 (implied by the course requirements); also implied by the National Curriculum Programmes of Study, QCA, 2007)
10. a general knowledge of a range of music from different times, traditions and cultures (Pflederer, 1964; MENC, 1984; Rogers, 2009; DfE, 2013)
11. the ability to discuss, write and/or draw about the expressive content of music (Pflederer, 1964; MENC, 1984; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Hallam, 2006; DfE, 2013)
12. the ability to aurally analyse the relationships between sounds (aural discrimination) (Gordon, 1997; Bentley in Hallam, 2006; Hallam, 2006; Paynter in Mills & Paynter, 2008; DfE, 2013).

Many of these competencies feature quite strongly in the National Curriculum Orders for Music in England (DfE, 2013) and the specifications for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) music (e.g. Pearson/Edexcel, 2021).

My research into the ‘biography of music teachers, their understanding of musicality and the implications for secondary music education’ went on to examine the perceptions of participants (music teacher trainees and their more experienced mentors – serving music teachers in secondary schools) of how significant these competencies were in the development of musicians and how far these were a focus in the teaching of young people as observed in lessons. Findings from this research are shown in the table.

This data raises some interesting questions in the field of secondary music education in England.

Musical competence	Importance: mean ranking from n ≈ 39	Significance in observed teaching: mean ranking from n = 11
Performing on an instrument	1	1
Composing	5	6
Improvising	6	9
Use of musical terminology	10	5
Reading from staff notation	9	9
Singing with accurate intonation	3	7
Use of ICT to develop music	12	4
Performing music ‘by ear’	2	2
Harmonisation of melodies	11	12
General knowledge of a range of musics	7	3
Relate to the expressive content of music	8	11
Aural analysis between sounds	4	7

Dalladay 2014, p. 161

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For example, if trainees and teachers recognise that singing is an important skill in the developing musician (ranking in 3rd position of significance), why is there less of a focus on singing in the classroom (7th position out of 12)? However, to return to my father for a moment, he had very few of these competencies: he sang but rarely (eg to wish someone ‘happy birthday’), he did not play a musical instrument and he could not read from staff notation. But there were some that he possessed in abundance: for example, to have a general knowledge of music and to be able to relate (largely through discussion) to the expressive content of music.

There are many music educationalists who recognise a possible truth in the argument that musicianship and an understanding of music is part of our very nature as humans: that we are ‘hard-wired’ for music, and that we are, all of us, effectively, musicians (Welch, 2001; Mills, 2005; Cross, 2006). Also, in returning to the definition of a musician proposed above – that he/she is one who engages

actively with music – then, it could be argued that my father was a musician. I’m sure that many would argue this point for some time, especially that my father received no training to develop that potential for musicianship (or, did he? Not formally, perhaps, but self-taught). But why does this matter and why is it potentially important for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in England?

MUSICIAN-TEACHER IDENTITY

As part of the research described above, a survey was completed by a larger range of participants (n = 69) across a small range of ITE institutions (five). One of the statements posed, with which respondents indicated the extent of their agreement using a Likert scale of 7, was ‘I would call myself a musician.’ It is perhaps not surprising, as these were all practising musicians, that there was 100% agreement (Likert ‘score’ of 5–7). However, when it came to their identity as musicians, an interesting variance was

noted amongst a sample of six of the core participants who were asked whether they considered themselves as musicians first or teachers first:

T1 musician (active musician in the community)

T2 both (now beginning to take on more musical activities)

T8 shifting balance from musician to teacher (‘teaching is like a performance’)

T10 teacher (‘the longer I teach, the more difficult it is to be a musician’)

T11 both (teacher in the week; musician at weekends)

S4 musician (‘this is part of my identity’)

(Dalladay, 2014, p. 213)

This is a very small sample, admittedly, but it would seem that for some teachers their identity as a musician gets ‘pushed to one side’ by their identity as a teacher,

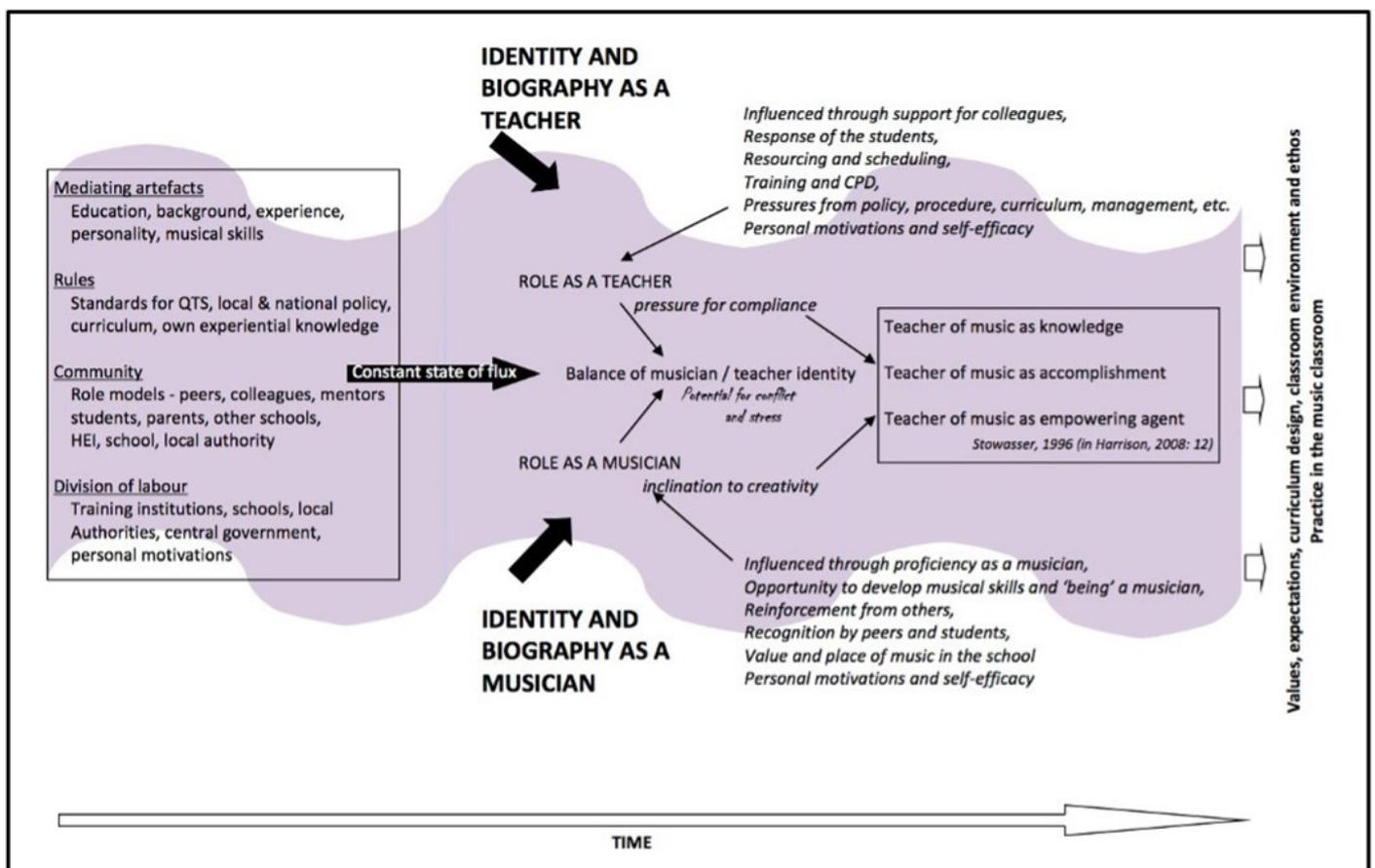


Figure 1 A model of the musician-teacher identity (Dalladay 2014, p. 240)

with its different demands, curriculum, expectations, pressures, working environment, etc (Kemp, 1986; Roberts, 1991). An example would be the trainee teacher, whom I shall call 'John': an experienced wind instrument performer in the Western classical tradition, secure in his own musicianship, but where this security was shaken when working in a musical genre he was less familiar with, and in thinking about how to convey the knowledge and skills required for the students to perform the music in a way which they might more easily understand. This reappraisal of John's identity as a musician was further disrupted when he was required to work with and demonstrate to his pupils on the keyboard (as the classroom was set up with electronic keyboards)—he had little skill on this instrument and found it challenging to model to the students (Dalladay, 2014, p. 214). In the professional world of a performing musician, John would have felt confident and secure on his principal instrument but in that of a classroom music teacher, his self-assurance was rocked and his identity as a musician brought into question (he did go on later to successfully gain his Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and secure a school teaching position).

Figure 1 demonstrates a potential model of the 'musician-teacher' identity produced as part of the research so far described. This model has been derived from 'Activity Theory', originally conceived by Vygotsky (1978) and developed by others, such as Engeström (2001) and, in relation to music education (novice cathedral choristers), by Welch (2011). I used the traditional triangular form of the diagrammatic representation of Activity Theory to explore the development of the secondary music teacher (Dalladay, 2014, p. 90), in which their development is impacted by 'mediating factors', 'rules', 'community' and 'division of labour'. These have been transposed into the model in Figure 1. These aspects are in a

constant state of flux... as the teacher is affected by changes in circumstances, on-going life experiences, the needs of the students in their care, the changing shape of policy and practice, as well as any changes to temperament and personality (cf. Saunders, 2008)... The balance between the teacher's identity as a musician or teacher can be a cause from some conflict in the teacher's life, as 'cherished' views on music and musicality are challenged by the needs and practice of the employing school and those of the students themselves (Kemp, 1996; Bernstein, 2000 in Beck & Young, 2005; Mills, 2005). (Dalladay, 2014, p. 239)

THE ISSUE OF SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

Identity aside for one moment (this is a complex, though interesting, aspect of the musician-teacher's role as it is, but it is only part of the focus of this paper), the relationship between what makes someone a potentially highly developed musician and their role as a secondary school music teacher can also be in a large amount of flux, and so, therefore, can be their effectiveness when working with young people. This flux is created by several factors, but their skills, knowledge and understanding are three very important aspects. Kemp, as far back as 1996, was warning us that the best musicians do not always make the best teachers. The principal issue would seem to lie in that, to be an effective teacher in the classroom, teachers need to have a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding. The current Pearson's GCSE music specification for the appraising paper, for instance, requires a secure and confident knowledge in instrumental music 1700–1820, vocal music including genres as wide as music from Purcell to Queen, music for stage and screen, and fusions (e.g. Afro Celt) (Pearson/Edexcel, 2021). 'The average music teacher in English secondary schools has, very frequently, been educated within what is termed the Western "classical" tradition

and entered the profession having largely developed their own musicianship through the performance route' (Dalladay, 2022, p. 3; cf. Welch *et al.*, 2011). The extension of what the musician has grown up with in their development, 'explodes' by necessity as they consider the role of music teacher.

One cohort (2020–1) of 12 secondary music teacher trainees in an English university was represented by the following undergraduate degree courses:

- Popular music performance (x2)
- Music performance and production
- Popular music studies
- Viola performance
- Music [however that term is interpreted] (x5)
- Digital arts
- Musical composition

(Dalladay, 2022)

In what way have these courses prepared these students to become teachers? Of course, this was not their aim and it is usual for musicians to specialise as they advance in their studies. However, in England, the typical route to becoming a teacher is to study for an undergraduate degree (which may not reference teaching as part of a portfolio career at all, or little) and then to undertake ITE at a university or within a school, so the preparation of the trainee in terms of their developing subject knowledge (as the knowledge, skills and understanding are known) can be problematic, with barely one year's training before entering the profession (cf. Durrant & Laurence, 2010; Porton, 2020). In other countries, such as the USA (Haning, 2021), it is more common for the potential teacher to take a degree over a number of years which includes teacher training, so development of their subject knowledge takes place alongside their training as a teacher. This method of teacher training also once pertained in England and I, for one, trained in music and teaching over a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Education degree (1974–8) which

included the Certificate in Education (the equivalent to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) today). Today's system, however, can leave potential music teachers (and perhaps those in other subject areas as well) inadequately prepared for teaching the full breadth of their subject (ref. 'John' mentioned earlier) (Dalladay, 2022).

A recent paper I have written in preparation for possible publication in due course (Dalladay, 2022) covers this very subject of music teachers' subject knowledge and with a particular focus on composing. Many of our music teachers in England come to the profession as performers (Rogers, 2002; Welch *et al.*, 2011) and yet many fewer have very much experience in composing – 63% having 'composed music for public use' in my study of 2014 and most of these in non-'classical' genres where jamming and improvising are often more common (eg in jazz and contemporary popular music). In the table of competencies above, composing is considered a pretty important musical skill (ranked in fifth position), yet many of our teachers have little skill in it themselves (Dalladay, 2022; cf. Paynter, 2002). Composing is also one of the three principal activities in the music curriculum – performing, composing, and listening and appraising (DfE, 2013).

It is, of course, unlikely that any training music teacher will have so broad a subject knowledge that nothing will ever require further study and experience, but there is a danger that many will require significantly increased subject knowledge in order to teach with complete assurance and ability to model proficiently (cf. Durrant & Laurence, 2010). The issue is exacerbated by the sheer breadth of a subject like music where (ignoring the multitude of practical skills required (singing, playing, composing, etc), just the historical and cultural context of the subject is staggering, covering tens of thousands of years (though, for the purposes of music education, this history rarely extends beyond the most recent

500 years or so) and an array of nations, traditions and musical styles (in current music education, this is often limited to the music of the Orient, Africa, India, Indonesia, the Caribbean, the Americas and Europe – did I say 'limited'?) (cf. Menuhin & Davis, 1979; Dalladay, 2022).

THE WIDER CURRICULUM

How far does the situation described in the previous paragraph, also pertain to other curriculum subjects? It is perhaps the case that music teachers will frequently be practising musicians (performing on an instrument and in ensembles), art teachers will be artists in the practical sense (painters, sculptors), sports teachers will be practising sports people (often at local and national levels), drama teachers will be actors. This is common in teachers of the arts. It is perhaps less common for a science teacher to identify themselves as scientists (Roberts, 1991), and here we come back to the teacher's identity as a practitioner or teacher: I suspect (and this is a purely unsupported view, except through working with science teacher colleagues for many years) that few science teachers go home at the end of the day to, for example, conduct scientific experiments. Further, it is interesting to note that I could locate thus far no academic paper/research that discussed the relationship between the identity of a maths teacher as teacher and mathematician in a similar manner to musician and music teacher. It is possible, as Ilany (2022) suggests, that this is because the subject has a 'special status': 'no one is indifferent to it! There are people who love math and those who hate it, there are people who succeed in math and those who fail in it; there are people who think math is essential and those who think math is overrated! But no one is indifferent to it (Picker & Berry, 2000)' (Ilany, 2022, para. 2.3). We all do mathematics and it is core to much of what we do (shopping, telling the time, banking, etc).

Whilst Lockhart (n.d.) would unequivocally

refer to maths as an art, it is perhaps the more acknowledged art subjects (music, drama, dance, art; plus sport) where the subject knowledge and the lived experience are so crucial. In the area of musical composition, for example, it is not uncommon for a music teacher to be inexperienced in composing to any great depth, for it to be largely absent in their undergraduate degrees and, therefore, to struggle, when modelling and teaching it to their students (Paynter, 2002; Rogers, 2002; Dalladay, 2014, 2022). Yet it has been suggested that fine-art teachers are frequently creating their own artistic artefacts (Paynter, 2002), and dramatists will frequently devise works of the 'now', to explore their own lived experiences in their turn. Drama is not only about performing plays that have been written by others, it is also about exploring life through improvisation and devising one's own acted-out stories (Pammenter, 2013). In order to teach most effectively, we not only need to be experienced in (if not expert in) the majority of areas of our subject that we may need to inculcate our students with, but we must also be practitioners who can improvise and devise in those areas, and, in the case of music, at least, it is in this aspect that our teachers and potential teachers can be known to struggle (Durrant & Laurence 2010).

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

To return to the first part of the question upon which the premise of this paper is centred: 'was my dad a musician?'; the answer will most likely be 'yes' in that he practically engaged with musical sound (through active listening), having some deep understanding of the meanings within the music (what the music meant to him, if not the composer or performer) and in moving and affecting him powerfully in his life. However, his musicianship was insufficiently broad for him to have ever been able to teach the subject, had he had the inclination to do so, without considerably more training and practice.

He was, even late in life, still in the earlier stages of progression on the road towards full musicianship. I myself, for many years, also considered whether I might or might not be a musician. I had a lot more training than my father: O-level and A-level qualifications (low grades!), and an undergraduate degree which integrated the development of my musicianship with teaching pedagogy (Bachelor of Education (Honours), Leeds). But, before my degree studies, I was largely self-taught and, when starting degree studies, felt my skills and knowledge somewhat inadequate compared to those of my peers. However, I had one significant advantage: being largely self-taught, my musical interest was piqued by a whole range of topics rather than a predetermined curriculum: singing, 'classical' and church music, folk music, popular music, piano playing, notation and a very wide range of historical periods, cultures and traditions. This, I'm sure, helped me considerably in being prepared to teach the subject. I may not have been an expert at anything, but my subject knowledge was broad and extensive. I will leave it up to 27 years' worth of young people and 16 years' worth of teacher trainees to attest to the effectiveness of my teaching but I have concluded that I am a musician and have been for a long time.

So, in answer to the second half of my question – 'and why does this matter to teacher education?' – I would suggest that it matters because (1) how we see ourselves gives us the assurance (or not) to teach our young people; (2) teaching requires more than just being a subject specialist (aside from the teaching pedagogy): it requires much more depth and experience in order to teach most effectively; and (3) the process of teacher training needs to be reviewed in order to take specialist practitioners (eg musicians, mathematicians, scientists, sports people) and enable them to be confident and expert enough in their subject to be able to model, demonstrate and guide those young people they are potentially working with.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The whole matter of a teacher's subject knowledge, their preparedness for teaching including the extent of their subject knowledge, and how far they see themselves as either a subject practitioner and/or teacher-of-a-subject (and I would see a difference here and that is crucial for effective teaching) has been at the centre of this current discourse. My conclusions include that, in many cases, subject knowledge can be so wholly specialised by the time potential teachers complete their degree studies that their confidence and assurance in those areas of the curriculum not covered in this specialism can be disadvantageous in a career as a teacher. In particular, this can be true in their early years as they have to continue with their own subject development whilst coping with all the various extensive and time-consuming aspects of the job. How a teacher sees him/herself (their identity) can also have a major impact, and, it could be argued, those who view themselves as teachers teaching a subject will more often be in a stronger position to deepen and extend their knowledge and skills in order to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum. Those who view themselves as subject practitioners (eg principally musicians) and, thus, experts in often quite narrow fields (eg as performers on one or two musical instruments) will probably find teaching frustrating, especially at the beginning, and hard work as they develop their subject expertise in areas they feel less than confident or, even, interested in (eg an expert and skilful rap artist who performs by ear having to teach musical notation and/or Western 'classical' music).

Added to the previous two points (subject knowledge and professional identity) comes the framework in which the potential teacher can address them. During a typical one-year (actually, little more than ten-month) teacher training course such as the PGCE, the amount

of time on the programme that can be devoted to subject development is limited: trainees are generally expected to have studied their subject to sufficient depth and breadth in their previous studies (Durrant & Laurence, 2010; cf. Porton, 2020). And whilst in school as a trainee or Early Career Teacher (ECT), the rigours and demands of the job can limit this time even more. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is, further, frequently limited to school-wide issues such as assessment or administration, with few opportunities, in any subject, for teachers to spend time on CPD focusing on their own personal subject development (eg when a biologist is required to teach physics, or a performing musician to teach composition) (Ofsted, 2012). Swanwick (1999), as far back as the end of the previous millennium, raises this point in relation to music when he states that 'secondary school music teachers may find themselves veering uncomfortably from their own musical specialism (which may or may not be valued by students) and an insecure "generalism"' (Swanwick, 1999, p. 99). My own anecdotal observation across all phases of all subject areas, as ex-co-ordinator of an Assessment Only Route to QTS, suggests that this situation is little different in other areas of the curriculum.

The implications from the reflections in this paper can be summed up as follows:

- Undergraduates should be more adequately prepared for 'portfolio careers'. In music, especially, it is not uncommon for musicians to take on the role of 'teacher' at some point (eg teaching their instruments). In this way, more subject-based knowledge, skills, understanding and the associated pedagogy can be included as part of degree studies.
- ITE courses themselves might be restructured (perhaps made longer), so as to provide more time on-programme for the development of trainees' subject knowledge appropriate to the prevailing curriculum and examination specifications.

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- ITE leaders, when interviewing and considering potential trainees, might wish to consider the breadth of subject knowledge as well as its depth and specialist/expert nature.
- The need for Subject Knowledge Enhanced and/or Booster courses, which do exist in some limited subject areas, should be provided in all subject areas, even if some funding has to be provided by the attendees themselves as part of preceding ITE programmes.

- In-post teachers need to be provided with increased opportunities to attend fully funded CPD which is specifically focused on the development of their own, personal subject-knowledge needs.

FINALE

My father can be defined (or, could) as a musician and his musicianship served him and his children (me) very well indeed, helping to motivate me in the development of my own musicianship and in becoming a school class music teacher.

However, his musicianship in itself, was insufficiently broad and deep for him to ever consider becoming as teacher as well (if the thought ever crossed his mind – unlikely, I think!). The limits of his identity as a musician can be seen to a greater extent in those of other practitioners (eg scientists, sports people, historians, etc) and these practitioners will, undoubtedly, face similar issues. Therefore, the question of my dad’s musicianship can be seen as vital to the world of Initial Teacher Education.’ ■

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