

## MUSICAL IDENTITY OF A MUSIC TEACHER

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### **Abstract**

*The article analyzes the problem of musical identity of a music teacher. Alongside with the presentation of the research on the subject, the concept of identity, specific features of teacher's identity, controversies of music teacher's identity are discussed as well. The strategy of narrative analysis has been chosen for the empirical research, the narratives provided by four music teachers are examined, after having answered the question: when did you feel yourself to be a musician in the context of a pedagogical activity? The research data has been analyzed through the method of thematic analysis, i. e. the aim was to look for common thematic elements among the participants of the research and their stories. Analysis of the presented narratives helped to highlight the categories of teachers' musical identity: artistic individuality of a music teacher, interpretation of music as the expression of musical identity, interaction between identities of a musician and a pedagogue.*

**Keywords:** music teacher, musical identity

### **Introduction**

Identity is one of the most problematic concepts of social sciences and the humanities (Valantiejus, 2001). This is because each person has several identities: national, professional, institutional, cultural, gender, race, ethnic, etc. (Čiubrinskas, 2008; Mensah, 2012; McClellan, 2017; Sakadolskienė, 2017). Personal identity can be related to a person's roles performed in

- a) a specific social group (for example, in family a woman is a mother, a wife, a daughter, a chef, and a woman at the same time),
- b) in professional activity (for example, a musician can be a performer, an artist manager, a music pedagogue, a seminar tutor at the same time),

- c) in society (for example, a musician can be a freelance artist, a public servant or a citizen at the same time).

Some identities are particularly striking, others are less, depending on the surroundings and the role performed in a specific situation. Identification can be both a long-term and an instantaneous process, determined by a specific situation and its context.

Representatives of each profession have their own identity. The problem of a teacher's identity has been extensively investigated by educators, psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and is related to the purpose of a pedagogue's profession 'to bring up' a society (Verbylė, 2014; Carrillo, Baguley & Vilar, 2015; Sakadolskienė, 2017). Ballantyne, Kerchner & Arostegui (2012) perceive a teacher's identity as the essence of this profession. According to the scientists, a teacher's identity performs an essential role in the educational process, since the perception of one's role as of an educator, and the prevailing educational philosophy determine the character of teacher's participation in the educational process.

In works by the authors who have investigated the identity of a music teacher (Isbell, 2008; Ballantyne & Grootenboer, 2012; McClellan, 2017) the constituent parts of a music pedagogue's identity are presented, and their characteristic features are discussed. Scientists

- a) analyze the identity of a music teacher as the result of his/her socialization (Isbell, 2008; Pellegrino, 2009),
- b) relate it to personal qualities and specifics of professional activity (Ballantyne & Grootenboer, 2012; Martišauskienė & Tavoras, 2012),
- c) present the models of identity (Ballantyne & Grootenboer, 2012; McClellan, 2017),
- d) demonstrate the controversy of the identities of the representatives of this profession – a musician and a pedagogue (Pellegrino, 2009).

Various models of music teacher's identity were discussed in scientific literature. Wagoner (as cited in McClellan, 2017) considers that identity of a music teacher is based on five criteria: self-assessment, dedication to profession, inner strength, team spirit, all-encompassing activity of a music teacher. Isbell (2008) discusses three forms of the identity of a music teacher: teacher – self, teacher – other and a musician. Hargreaves and et al. (as cited in McClellan, 2017) identifies the following components of the conception of a music teacher's identity: time management, emotional perseverance, confidence, problem solving abilities, ability of setting adequate targets and respecting priorities.

Pellegrino (2009) presents a research carried out in Sweden in 1998 with 169 music teachers, during which the participants answered to two questions: *Who do you think you can be? Who do you want to become?*

Based on the research results four categories of music teacher's identity are distinguished: *all-around musician, performer, pupil-centered teacher, content-centered teacher*. Music pedagogues, defined as *all-around musician* or *pupil-centered teacher*, indicate their preference to knowledge of various music styles and development of different musical abilities. Meanwhile *performer* and *content-centered teacher* devote

more attention to individual music preferences, i. e. to the genre where they are most experienced and the instrument, which a teacher himself/herself can play.

Ballantyne & Grootenboer (2012) discuss the identity of a music teacher in three aspects: a music teacher as a pedagogue, a music teacher as a musician, interaction of these identities. According to the researchers, when identifying with the role of a pedagogue, teachers emphasize relations with pupils, their knowledge and mutual respect. Authors regard musical identity as necessary condition for successful teaching of music. According to McClellan (2017), orientation of a teacher-musician, self-concept and social identity of a music teacher (contact with co-workers, managers, lecturers, understanding of the value of teaching music, work environment) emerge as key components of music teacher's identity.

Reviewing scientific literature, Pellegrino (2009) related to the problem of music teacher's identity, believes that the conflict between music teacher's double identity exists. Controversy occurs when high expectations are set out not to one, but to several roles performed by teachers. According to the scientist, time management, attempt to harmonize teacher's professional life (lessons, rehearsals, meetings, document management), socialization and family life become a problem. High expectations, orientation towards different spheres of professional activity might have an adverse effect on teacher's performance at work and on the professional career. On the other hand, according to McClellan (2017), different identities of a music teacher are not necessarily controversial and can be the essential factor of success in music education.

Researchers (Pellegrino, 2009; Ballantyne & Grootenboer, 2012) show that music pedagogues prefer identity of a musician and tend to identify with the role of a music performer. Particularly music experiences become the instrument enabling music teachers to perceive who they are and what they are doing. Musical abilities determine identification of music teachers with relevant roles: pedagogues with high musical abilities are more likely to identify themselves as musicians, meanwhile teachers, aware of the lack of their musical abilities, have a tendency of identifying with a role of a teacher (Ballantyne, Kerchner & Arostegui, 2012). Isbell (2008) points out that the identity of a teacher becomes stronger with age and experience accumulated in a particular sphere.

A short review of research on music teacher's identities shows that this problem has been quite extensively investigated. However, only some researchers have paid attention to understanding of teacher's musical identity. Analysing teacher's identity the method of interview with music teachers is applied in most cases. Varied research by using different methodological approaches has not been done often. We succeeded to find only some examples of narrative analysis in scientific literature investigating a teacher's identity (Pellegrino, 2009; Carillo and at al., 2015). In the opinion of the authors of the article, narrative analysis is the most appropriate to reveal the characteristics of music teacher's identity since the participants are indirectly presenting their personal views about the issues raised. Given that, the research questions have been raised:

- *In what contexts of professional activity does teachers' musical identity manifest itself?*
- *What are the spheres of its expression?*

**The object of the research:** musical identity of a music teacher.

**The aim of the research:** to reveal the features of a music teacher's identity.

**The methods of the research:** analysis of literature and a narrative interview with music teachers.

## **Methodology and Sample**

The strategy of narrative analysis has been chosen for the empirical research. Narrative can be „*the structure of the reflexion on research, the method, the object of the research (phenomenon) and methodology at the same time. <...> It is a form of a qualitative research, containing collection of narratives – written, oral and visual*“ (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017, 232). According to Seidman (2006), a narrative can be a short story about a specific event, retelling of significant events in an individual's life or the narrative of the whole life. The basis of this research is narratives of music teachers. Teachers were asked to tell about a situation in their professional activity when they felt to be musicians. Analysis of the research data helped to identify the spheres of expression of teachers' musical identity.

### ***Participants of the research***

The strategy of narrative analysis is not appropriate to explore the population. In this case, the analysis limits itself to the narrative of several people or even one person (Riessman, 2012). The basis of this research became the narratives of four music teachers (Rasa, Daiva, Vida, Jane – names have been changed), working at schools in Klaipėda city. While choosing the participants of the research, teachers' experience in music and their professional activity were the main arguments. All teachers have been working as music pedagogues for more than 15 years, they all have the category of expert teacher, they conduct lessons and manage pupils' music collectives that have won in national and international contests multiple times. During the research, the participants were regarded as intelligent, flexible figures capable of adapting to the situation professionally and with understanding. Participants of the research were not considered as informants, acting in accordance with the framework established by the researcher, but rather more like the subjects of the research, its participants, co-workers (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017).

### ***Collection and analysis of the research data***

The essential method used in the narrative analysis for the collection of data is interview. The main aim during the interview is to recreate personal experience of the participant within the framework of the theme investigated. The researchers carried out the following three-interview series model by Seidman (2006). During the first interview, the context of the participant's experience was explored; during the second interview, there was a discussion about specific experience within the framework of the theme analyzed; in the third interview, the participant was asked to reflect on her experience. In the beginning of the meetings, teacher told her stories. Later, in order to collect the material as informative as possible, teacher contacted again to supplement and specify the information. Researchers asked teacher to tell briefly about her work

experience, present and past musical activities. This information was regarded as a social, artistic, pedagogical context of the collected stories.

Teachers answered to open question: tell a story about the case when you felt yourself a musician in the context of a pedagogical activity. The researchers presented the question a week before the meeting. This way the teachers had an opportunity to remember and decide which story was the most significant to them. The participants could tell their stories in the form chosen.

During the interview, the researcher fulfilled the requirements set to the narrative interview: there were no prior hypotheses made before the interviews, this way allowing the participants' freedom and the researchers a necessary space to put forward hypotheses and draw conclusions later while analysing the research materials. The aim was to remain open, to discover what the stories had to offer (Seidman, 2006).

Transcription of the information obtained during the interviews was performed meticulously, recording every word of the participants, alongside with such elements as pauses, laughter, smiles. In the opinion of the researchers, in certain cases these details influenced the understanding of words' meaning. After the transcription of the interviews, the authors of the work shaped each teacher's personal history from the material obtained. Attention was paid to a specific event that, according to the teachers, reflected the theme of the work and more fully answered the question presented. In order to give to a reader the story in fluent language, the researchers edited transcriptions by performing the following actions:

- 1) *unnecessary, repeating words, and word parts that do not change the meaning of the word or a compound were eliminated;*
- 2) *in some cases the word order in a sentence was changed;*
- 3) *additional words were inserted for a reader to understand the idea better.*

Based on transcribed narratives the researchers performed the interpretive data analysis (Riessman, 2012). The research data was analyzed using the method of thematic analysis, i. e. by looking for common thematic elements among the participants of the research and their stories. The primary stage of the data analysis consisted of reading the interview transcriptions in order to immerse into the data (Harlow & Cobb, 2014), to perceive "*the variety of understandings, behaviour, strategies and interactions*" of the research participants (Žydzūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017, 58). The next step was encoding of the data and their allocation to as many categories as possible. The third stage aimed at reducing the number of categories by combining them in larger thematic groups. During the research, the issues related to performance of the research and interpretation of the results were considered; they were compared to the conclusions found in scientific literature. In order to ensure the validity of the research, description of the research results was presented to the participants of the research to determine whether their experiences were correctly understood. There were not any remarks or adjustments presented.

## **The Results of the Research**

Empirical research on musical identity of a music teacher has revealed the following thematic categories: artistic individuality of a music teacher, interpretation of music as

the expression of musical identity, interaction between the identities of a musician and a pedagogue. Alongside with their presentation, quotes from teachers' stories will be provided.

### **A. Artistic individuality of a music teacher**

According to Martišauskienė & Tavoras (2012), artistic individuality in teacher's activity manifests itself through reflexivity, creativity, responsibility and artistic elements. Responsibility in Rasa's and Jane's narratives is observed through their work with pupils while preparing them for performances, respect for the audience, understanding of personal role to obtain results. Jane tells: *„I teach my pupils that we have to go on stage fully prepared, respecting the listener. Being on stage has to be respected“*. The teacher considers the moment on stage as very important, requiring particular preparedness from a pupil or a group: *„I tell my pupils – let's always put more effort during rehearsals“*. Attention to responsible preparedness is highlighted in Rasa's narrative: *„We went to sing like in a concert, not in a rehearsal“*. Teacher's personal attitude towards the performance of the interpreted music is important: *„If a composition does not sound properly, I myself did not do everything needed, did not open the composition, did not understand it“* (Rasa).

Artistic individuality is also reflected through teacher's inner strength (McClellan, 2017), through decision-making power based on experience (Martišauskienė & Tavoras, 2012). In narratives inner strength manifests itself through teacher's ability to influence pupils, a pedagogue's energy: *„If a teacher is interested, pupils will also get interested“*. According to Vida, a teacher's strong belief in the value of something is passed on to the other person. This idea is supported by Rasa's narrative, which illustrates how a teacher's inner strength is manifested during the time when the composition is prepared. Then a teacher serves as an inspiration, as an example showing to pupils how to experience and render the idea of the composition suggestively, and how to become a leader to the listeners helping them to perceive the music performed. *„This is highly dependent on me“* (Rasa).

Inner strength is necessary to not only create an interest or inspire. In Daiva's narrative the importance of teacher's belief in her powers in the contexts of an artistic activity can be seen. The pedagogue tells that pupils without any music education come to her to sing, but *„still with patience and work a lot can be done“*. Daiva speaks about the concept of personal powers by paraphrasing a well-known proverb: *„Everyone is the master of one's destiny, the result will depend on the effort made“*.

Artistic individuality is related to the orientation of a teacher – a musician (McClellan, 2017). Perception of oneself as of a teacher or a musician influences the pedagogue's attitudes, decisions made. The narratives analyzed could serve as an example showing the conflict between the identities of a musician and a teacher described in literature. Two teachers – Daiva and Jane – have different attitudes. According to Jane, *„a music teacher firstly has to be professional musician“*, meanwhile Daiva is convinced to the contrary: *„I am not a performer, I am a teacher“*. Even though their professional understanding differs, teachers' narratives enable thinking that they both are oriented towards pupils and work with them.

If we regard a successful teacher as the one who is capable of working brilliantly and bringing up the young generation, then success of a musician – a performer or a

creator – in many cases depends on how well teacher's personal and musical abilities are developed. The theme of musical abilities appears in teachers' narratives several times, when the content of music education requires certain musical abilities that manifest themselves in particular contexts. Most often beyond lessons. Due to this reason, the situations where pupils get acquainted with musical abilities of their music teacher are special. This is illustrated by Vida's narrative. A teacher claims: *„I never sing in operatic voice, which I studied in university“*. Once the teacher demonstrated her vocal abilities; her pupils *„could not believe. They looked at me as if enchanted, this was completely out of the ordinary to them“*. In this situation Vida as though discovers her musical abilities again: *„Then I felt that I have preserved that opera basis, <...> that was the moment, when I understood myself that I was still capable of using the experience accumulated“*; *„I felt like an expert in vocal“*.

For teacher Jane musical abilities are necessary to work with the choir: *„It is enough only to hear that sound of four voices when fifty people start singing, it is a complete satisfaction. Then I think – how much I can do, how much we can do together“*. Although in the quotation musical abilities are attributed to the whole collective, a teacher also evaluates the influence of her own musical abilities on the result: *„How much I can do“*.

Daiva feels herself to be a musician in similar situations, i. e. when she performs music together with her pupils: *„I sing on stage together with children. So I am a musician permanently“*. Daiva also has a firm attitude towards musical abilities of music teachers: *„Obviously, a teacher has to be professional, undoubtedly. He/she has to know musical issues, particularly playing music, singing, vocal, for sure. Otherwise, there will not be any result“*. Even though teachers' musical abilities often stay 'aside', however, the participants acknowledge their importance.

### ***B. Interpretation of music as the expression of musical identity***

From pedagogues' narratives, a teacher is comparable to a musician when he/she organizes non-formal activities, participates in events, concerts, competitions. It is particularly in these contexts where teachers' musical identity reveals. Referring to the narratives presented, teachers relate musical activity to the interpretation of compositions. All narratives present musical experiences beyond the context of a lesson, the identity of a musician is discovered during non-formal musical activity.

Teacher Rasa starts her story with the description of a person interpreting music: *„As a musician I could present many and various examples of performing music, since you try to interpret each composition <...> to look for the way of its performance. I like it, I enjoy looking for that key“*. Searching for the variant of interpreting the composition is a situation experienced continuously. Concerning pupils' preparation to the contest, Jane claims: *„I searched, they searched, we searched together“*. The process of musical activity is constantly accompanied by finding a new arrangement, designing the plan of interpreting the piece. *„Looking for those keys“* is interesting to Rasa, this process inspires and excites her.

The motive of 'leaving school frames' is significant in narratives. Teachers perceive playing music at school as an everyday, challenge-free activity. The participants do not relate music lessons to artistic activity and they even define lessons as 'frames'. Escaping the frames, according to Rasa, means *„feeling good on stage, rendering one's inner world, sharing music and the gift of musicianship“*. However, in the opinion of

teachers, performing abilities are not the most important. As Vida argues, *„performance technique is not everything. Maybe pupils are not capable of performing everything as professional artists, but majority of them have values higher than school standard“*. The lack of pupils' abilities to perform does not lessen the opportunity to bring value to the composition, to convey musical message.

Teachers' thoughts regarding listeners' reactions, recognition received, impression made on the audience are also important. Jane urges her pupils: *„Let's enjoy our singing, people's reactions“*, and talking about the performance she considers: *„Our work has been presented and it has been performed in such a way that it could reach every listener“*. During the preparation for the international competition Jane says to her pupils: *„Let's tell a story about Lithuania in songs“*. In teacher's opinion, it is mandatory for a music performer to not only discover and fill compositions with meaning, but also to convey this meaning to listeners: *„If you are on stage, then you are higher than the audience in the strict sense. This means you have to respect them and sing in such a way that they understood why you are on stage“*.

The effect of music performance on the listener was mentioned in the stories of all teachers. Therefore, teachers set high requirements to themselves and the pupils. As maintained by Rasa, *„You can sing notes very well and without faults, but you need to convey the content, to send out a message“*. It depends on the teacher whether and how pupils will succeed in expressing the idea of the composition. Rasa assumes the responsibility for the performance of the composition: *„It depends on me a lot, since we travel together with pupils the road of sharing music“*.

### ***C. Interaction between the identities of a musician and a pedagogue***

Conversations with the research participants, transcriptions of the interviews and later stories prepared on their basis show that in music teacher's profession identities of a musician and a teacher are inextricably linked. Even though the question given to the teachers focused their attention on musical identity, still their stories are full of statements showing that they perceive themselves as educators. Even in the first conversation Jane argued: *„Why do I particularly feel that as a professional musician? Because some of my pupils have chosen a career in music“*. Pupils, their achievements in music, choice of a career in music are pointed out as factors allowing regarding oneself as a musician. Pupils' success allowed Jane to consider herself a successful musician. Vida's experience is similar. Vida discovers herself as a musician after sharing with pupils in her skills: *„When I started singing in operatic voice, pupils were astonished. Then I felt myself such a professional singer“*. Both stories show that pedagogical moments encourage teachers to perceive themselves as musicians and vice versa.

In the narratives different identities of a teacher are revealed: some constantly performed, others – in certain situations. Teachers perceive themselves not only as musicians or teachers, but also as 'inspiration' to pupils' activity. Rasa thinks that a teacher is the basic impetus supporting pupils' activity, their inspiration for search, intensity of activity: *„If a teacher is interested, children become interested as well“*. The narratives reveal that a teacher's activity is oriented towards not only music education, but also towards the development of a pupil's personality. Such an attitude stimulates a music teacher to undertake a responsible and meaningful activity. In the stories of the research participants, a frequent theme is a desire to give, to convey, and to show. Sharing the experience is a striking motive in Vaida's story, where she discovers for



herself how meaningful music teacher's profession is: „*You start to understand that you already feel them and you can give them a lot. A magic moment when they acquire teacher's knowledge, experience, understanding*“.

The ability to perceive pupils' potential is of no lesser importance. Vida points out that „*it is obvious how pupils think, what their opinion of meaningful moments of understanding music is*“. Jane reasons: „*The essence of pedagogical work is not to overload with tasks, with theoretical subjects. Pupils need to be open for music. Not the tasks performed in the classroom or their quantity is of the key importance*“. What is essential in pedagogical work then? According to Jurga, „*...humanity comes in the first place*“. The theme that recurs in the stories is the relations of the participants with pupils, their wish to work in educational sphere. „*I love children*“, - Daiva explains her choice to become a teacher. Rasa argues: „*This contact with children is, in fact, the most important*“. A need for unity and warm relationship with pupils is expressed in Jane's narrative: „*It was a fantastic feeling to be on stage and not to conduct my pupils, but to be a part of their collective, to be together with them. Being on stage with pupils is what motivates me*“.

## Conclusions

1. Identity is defined as a constantly evolving multi-faceted phenomenon, enabling to give meaning to oneself and to find one's place in the society. Each individual creates one's personal (Self) and social (the role performed in the community) identities. Depending on situation and context, a person performs different roles in life and activity that could be designated as identities. Each individual has many different identities.
2. A teacher's identity is a construct based on which a teacher designs one's existence, behaviour, perception of work and one's place in society. In a contemporary educational paradigm, the attitude towards a teacher is radically changing: he/she is perceived as a creator, an initiator, a leader. Controversy concerning a teacher's profession has also been analyzed in scientific literature: a teacher is characterised as a person relying on personal philosophy and assuming responsibility for pupils' education, but at the same time 'pandering' the system and formal commitments. A teacher's identity is recognized as the essential condition for the implementation of educational goals.
3. The main characteristic feature of a music teacher's identity is controversy manifesting itself in the conflict between the identities of a musician and a teacher. Some authors regard this conflict as a negative phenomenon; others - identify it as a factor of success in a professional activity. Taking into account the relationship between the identities of a teacher and a musician, music pedagogues form their educational philosophy alongside with priorities and a teaching style. It is also observed that music teachers create 'Self' through relations with music and people.
4. Empirical research on musical identity of a music teacher has revealed the following thematic categories: music teacher's artistic individuality, interpretation of music as the expression of musical identity, interaction between the identities of a musician and a pedagogue. Artistic individuality of a

music teacher manifests itself through reflexivity, creativity, responsibility and artistic elements. Artistic individuality is also defined as the inner strength of a teacher, decision-making power based on experience to take decisions concerning music. In most cases, teachers relate musical identity to the interpretation of compositions, when music is experienced in a non-formal musical activity. New arrangement, creation of a plan for the interpretation, and performance of the composition to the listener, a desire to influence the audience are the constituent parts of the process of music performance. Even though teachers' aspirations are not always 'noticeable', they are significant to a teacher's musical identity, enabling to deal with the challenges in a professional activity. Personal educational philosophy is reflected in the research through the values fostered by music teachers: patient work, perseverance, humanity and community with others. In most cases, identities of a musician and a teacher are interrelated, supplementing each other. While talking about their experience as of musicians, teachers in most cases mention work with pupils.

5. In summary, perception of teacher's professional identity should be the focus of attention of both teachers and schools. It is particularly relevant to find ways how teachers could reflect on their professional activity, to guide music teacher's work taking into account the double professional identity (of a pedagogue and a musician), to initiate or orient teachers towards activities which would allow them to develop their identity in desired direction. Data of this research also enables universities to make recommendations how to improve music pedagogues's training. Cooperation between schools / teachers and universities could also be considered as a way allowing future music teachers to understand the structure of professional identity as well as their own identity. Study programmes, and particularly pedagogical practical placement, should be oriented towards perception of future music teacher's identity, individual needs of students.
6. Narrative analysis has helped not only to obtain information about teachers' musical identity, but has also enabled pedagogues to share their experience, to explain what they think and how. Therefore, the narrative analysis has to be regarded as an efficient research method to perceive educational processes (Harlow & Cobb, 2014). However, in order to understand music teachers' musical identity better, it would be appropriate to perform comparative analysis of identities of music teachers and teachers of other subjects as well as to take a comparative analysis of the factors influencing their formation, a more comprehensive justification of teaching and learning processes in this respect. Theoretical knowledge of music teacher's musical identity and knowledge of the situation based on research could contribute to training the teachers, and thus to the improvement of educational processes.

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