

2011

Transitioning from Student to Teacher in the Master-Apprentice Model of Piano Pedagogy: An Exploratory Study of Challenges, Solutions, Resources, Reflections, and Suggestions for the Future

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Transitioning from Student to Teacher in the Master-Apprentice Model of Piano
Pedagogy: An Exploratory Study of Challenges, Solutions, Resources, Reflections, and
Suggestions for the Future

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
School of Music
College of the Arts
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Date of Approval:
June 24, 2011

Keywords: induction, apprenticeship, experiential learning, cognitive apprenticeship,
practice-based professional learning, tacit knowledge, applied music, music education,
teacher training, teacher education, identity, reflective practice, interview

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving husband, Glen, and beautiful son, Vincent for showing me that there is more to life than academia and sitting on a piano bench.

Acknowledgements

Much appreciation is due to the many individuals that made the realization of this dissertation possible. I would not have completed this degree without the endless patience, support, and feedback of my adviser and Committee Chair, C. Victor Fung. Thank you! Additionally, many thanks are due to my committee members, William Hayden, David Williams, and Clint Randles who have been exceptionally supportive of my academic and research efforts throughout my graduate studies. My deep appreciation goes out to the numerous piano teachers who have inspired and shaped my teaching throughout the years and my students who served as a constant reminder as to why I began studying music in the first place. In addition, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the piano teachers who took the time to provide the information which made this study possible. I am forever grateful to my parents, Vince and Lorraine Maccarelli, for their support of my educational and musical endeavors. The time and financial commitment to my studies of the piano and violin as well as the numerous hours “Grandson sitting” Vincent will never be forgotten. I would also like to thank Peggy Allen and Patricia Bowes, as well as the many friends and family members who supported and encouraged me throughout my doctoral studies. Finally, I thank my husband, Glen Slawsky, for still loving me even though I made him move all over the state of Florida (and beyond) to pursue my (vast assortment of) professional and educational whims and goals, and for giving me our son, Vincent, who has brought new purpose and meaning to my life.

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Abstract

While many music educators learn how to teach through teacher education programs, the standard mode of transmission in which piano teachers learn to teach applied piano is through proficiency of the instrument under the guidance of a master teacher. This tacit development of pedagogical knowledge occurs through the master-apprentice model of pedagogy. The purposes of this study were (a) to explore how piano teachers learn how to teach from, and independent of, piano pedagogy coursework, overcome challenges, and continue to add to their pedagogy knowledge, and (b) to explore topics that would be most useful in a piano pedagogy course or program. This exploratory research design consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews. Piano teachers of varying ages, educational levels, and years of teaching experience ($N = 12$) were interviewed as to their experiences as students, autonomous transition into the teaching role, and the informal or formal learning opportunities which contributed to their development as piano teachers. Upon reflecting on their experiences in higher education compared to their professional lives as piano teachers, interviewees were asked to make suggestions for the future of piano pedagogy and the piano curriculum in general.

In analyzing the data, 11 major themes emerged in the interview transcripts which revealed aspects of the interviewees' transition into the teaching role and development as piano teachers: (1) piano teachers were autonomously resourceful when transitioning into the teaching role, (2) experiential learning (i.e., learning by doing, gaining experience, and trial-and-error), (3) piano teachers evoke memories (of former teachers, materials played, and experiences as students) in transitioning into the teaching role, (4) piano teachers emulate former teachers + a mix of elements in developing their teaching style,

(5) overcoming challenges and seeking out resources, (6) formal learning experiences (including piano pedagogy coursework), (7) partnership of learning and teaching (apprenticeship and cognitive apprenticeship), (8) support in the field (including the role of professional activities), (9) teaching confidence, (10) reflective practice, and (11) reflections and suggestions for the future.

The pianists interviewed experienced an autonomous transition into the teaching role as they received no formal teacher-training and very little guidance when beginning to teach. Although the master-apprentice model is often attributed as the primary means in which piano teaching is disseminated, experiential learning (e.g., learning by doing, gaining experience, and trial-and-error) factored just as prominently into the pianists' transition into the teaching role and early development as piano teachers. Additionally, apprenticeship (i.e., guided teaching) and cognitive apprenticeship (i.e., formal learning combined with authentic hands-on teaching experiences) were two facilitative modes of learning to teach experienced by some of the interviewees. The pianists interviewed demonstrated incredible personal initiative in navigating their autonomous transition into the teaching role and development as piano teachers (e.g., teaching style, teaching confidence, teaching identity, and reflective practice) by deriving meaning through the process of overcoming challenges, seeking out resources and support in the field, monitoring and correcting their own performance, and finding measures to continually refine their teaching.

The importance of pedagogical coursework and increased teacher-training experiences in the higher education setting were emphasized by all piano teachers interviewed, especially when combined with opportunities to observe *expert* piano

teaching and gain *authentic* hands-on teaching experiences. Similarly, some piano teachers described teaching while pursuing their degree(s) as a means of learning from an academic and career standpoint, as they could immediately apply what they were learning to their own teaching. Piano teachers emphasized the need for business skills for running a successful studio, performance skills beyond the traditional classical repertoire, functional skills to make a viable living (e.g., accompanying, improvisation, harmonizing melodies, and playing for church services), as well as techniques, materials, and special considerations for teaching across the entire lifespan (i.e., “cradle to grave”) for a wider variety of learners (e.g., beginning, intermediate, advanced, pre-school age through mature adult, and those with special needs).

This exploratory study provided a detailed perspective as to the induction experiences of the piano teacher. It is proposed that further exploration into the pianist’s transition into the teaching role could inform the development and restructuring of pedagogical coursework and a wealth of pedagogical materials for practitioners in the field as well as the framework for piano teacher education.