Teaching on the side: 'bread and butter' or vital, valuable vocation? Nurturing instrumental music teacher identities through further and higher music education.

Abstract

Instrumental music teaching is often viewed as a 'fall-back' career for musicians, many of whom undertake teaching 'on the side' whilst pursuing a performance or other musical career. Indeed, where musicians 'fall into' teaching without being fully prepared for it, some may suffer from teacher anxiety. In England, it is possible for individuals to deliver instrumental tuition without training or guidance, and many young musicians begin teaching even during their school years. Understanding these early experiences of delivering instrumental tuition may support the development of higher education music curricula to prepare future generations of musicians to enter the workforce. This paper discusses two research projects, undertaken concurrently (yet unknowingly) by two different researchers in England. Both projects engaged undergraduate music students as participants, with one focusing largely on university student perspectives on careers in instrumental teaching, and the other gathering similar perspectives from conservatoire students. The data emerging from questionnaires, interviews and written reflections across both projects demonstrate that significant numbers of music students are involved in delivering instrumental/vocal lessons prior to commencing undergraduate studies, often beginning with peer learning initiatives in or outside school, or helping family and friends. Findings suggest that more could be done via the transition through Further and Higher Music Education to support the development of instrumental music teacher identities, building on students' prior experiences of facilitating music making in others, and promoting instrumental teaching as a vital, valuable vocation for musicians.

Keywords: instrumental teaching; instrumental teacher training; instrumental teacher identity; possible selves; conservatoire; university music department

Introduction and research context

In the current economic climate, where careers in the music industry have been impacted by challenges such as Brexit, the Covid pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis (UK Music, 2022), it is more important than ever for Higher Education Music Institutions (HEMIs) to prepare aspiring professional musicians to enter a workforce where the portfolio career represents the dominant model of employment (Hennekam and Bennett, 2017; Bartleet et al., 2019). However, there still appears to be a mismatch between approaches to career preparation in universities and conservatoires and the reality of precarious careers in the music industry (Zhukov, 2019; Canham, 2022). Instrumental teaching is significant as one of a range of professional roles which musicians necessarily undertake to sustain portfolio careers in music (Blackstone 2019; Norton et al. 2019). Indeed, the authors of this paper represent common experiences of instrumental teachers in England. Both combined teaching with other professional roles as part of their early portfolio careers in music, beginning teaching with limited training or guidance, essentially learning 'on the job'.

All children and young people are entitled to an excellent music education (Huband-Thompson and Dawson, 2025) and instrumental music teachers play a significant role in supporting their musical development. However, instrumental music teaching is often perceived as having lower professional status than other roles in music (Boyle, 2021). Toyne (2025) concurs: 'To devote one's working life to instrumental teaching affects hundreds of lives, and this should be given similar status […] to those proceeding to performing careers' (online).

In stark contrast to classroom teaching in England, where Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is usually a prerequisite, instrumental teachers often begin teaching with little or no training and sometimes without any qualification in music at all (Boyle, 2018; Barton, 2019). Despite the emphasis on workforce development in the refreshed National Plan for Music Education in England (DfE and DDCMS, 2022), there is currently no regulation of instrumental teaching practices, and instrumental teacher education is a non-obligatory component of undergraduate music courses.

Arguably, however, musicians can develop aspirations and confidence in their potential to become instrumental music teachers if they are exposed to positive and inspirational role models in music education contexts. Many musicians are involved in some form of instrumental teaching before entering higher education (Mills, 2004; Shaw, 2023b; Boyle, 2024), yet they may not necessarily view teaching as a vital, valuable vocation. The current paper offers further insights into students' early teaching experiences, highlights the potential

impact of building on their existing skills in this area to develop confidence and the importance of developing a sense of professional instrumental music teacher identity.

The theoretical construct of 'professional identity' that underpins this research is concerned with how individuals experiment with 'provisional selves' as a preview for the kind of professional they might become in the future. In this context, professional identity is defined by Ibarra (1999: 764) as the 'attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role'. In the current study, the acquisition of these elements is linked to a view of identity development as socially situated and 'processual' (Bernard 2005; Smilde 2009). Indeed, according to Triantafyllaki (2010: 72), 'the professional identity of instrumental music teachers is in a large part due to socialisation within the professional community, the institutions that shape their practice during their careers and preceding generations of music teachers'.

In such 'Communities of Practice', 'learning and a sense of identity are inseparable […] aspects of the same phenomenon' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.115). Understandings and social interaction are intrinsically linked, interrelated and influenced by interaction between novices ('newcomers') and experts ('old-timers'). Illeris (2022, p.27) supports this notion, claiming that the formation of identity takes place at the intersection between interaction with others and acquisition of new skills, knowledge and experience. Similarly, Wenger (1998; 2018) relates the process of identity development to a learning trajectory in which individuals define themselves in relation to where they have been, where they are going, and the communities they belong to, or are becoming part of. As Illeris (2011) explains, 'The word "identity" itself derives from the Latin *idem,* which means "the same" and has to do with the experience of being the same or recognisable both to oneself and to others in changing situations' (p.27). In a later publication, Illeris (2022) also states that a significant element of identity is pride in one's profession. However, at times, an individual's pride in their vocation may result in ambivalence or resistance to learning new skills, which may in turn preclude the forming of new identities: a phenomenon described by Illeris (2018) as 'identity defence'.

In the field of higher music education, and instrumental teacher education specifically, pedagogical research has explored undergraduate students' perceptions of instrumental teaching and its role as part of the portfolio career (Mills 2004; Miller and Baker 2007; Burt-Perkins 2008; Long, 2016; Latukefu and Ginsborg 2018). Studies have also explored how music students can develop teaching skills in informal contexts or via small-scale projects (Haddon, 2009; Perkins et al., 2015). More recently, Shaw (2023b) demonstrated that conservatoire students can develop pedagogical knowledge over time within supportive

Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) within and outside their institution. This view aligns with Burland and Davidson (2016) who propose that the transition to professional musician status is influenced partially by positive experiences with other people (for example, peers, teachers and parents), as well as institutional factors. Indeed, for many musicians, understandings of instrumental teaching as a professional role are developed through interaction with influential teachers who can represent role models or 'possible selves' (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Creech and Papageorgi, 2014; Rowley, 2019). Students often begin delivering instrumental tuition whilst still in formal (pre-higher or 'further') education (Mills 2004; Boyle 2018). They may begin by offering tuition to friends or family members, exploring the application and communication of existing skills in these encounters (Boyle, 2024). Students also learn by observing or assisting former instrumental tutors, music workshop facilitators or ensemble leaders (Shaw, 2023b). Through these early teaching experiences, students experiment with 'provisional selves' by applying modes of communication and teaching strategies acquired in the context of their own prior music tuition. Over time, they may develop representations of themselves as professionals (Ibarra 1999; Cohen-Scali, 2003).

However, according to Boyle (2018, p. 58), many musicians who teach do not self-identify as a 'real teacher': perhaps implying that instrumental music teacher identity development should be central to musicians' professional training. In England, there are barriers to developing instrumental teacher identities in musicians, where 'fixed ideas and attitudes pertaining to 'ideal' musicians' careers' (Blackstone, 2019: 4) often reject instrumental teaching as 'something you do when you have failed as a performer' (AEC, 2010: 7). This kind of rejection could be regarded as an 'identity defence' response, as discussed above (Illeris, 2018). Indeed, it has been argued that where resistance to learning to teach is present, hegemonic assumptions may be at play, such as 'If you're a teacher, you're a failed musician' (Shaw, 2023a). However, in a later study involving conservatoire alumni, Shaw (2024) discovered that impostor feelings may also inhibit music teacher identity development.

Higher Music Education Institutions have an important role to play in promoting positive attitudes to developing music teacher competencies and identities. Shaw (2023c) uncovered inconsistencies in instrumental teacher education in conservatoires, which may be due at least in part to a lack of emphasis on pedagogical training in the soon-to-be revised Subject Benchmark statement for Music (QAA, 2019). However, in the context of training classroom music practitioners, Haning (2021) recommends that as institutions examine and revise curricula, they 'carefully consider what opportunities [future] music educators have to further

develop and reinforce their teacher identities' (p.47). McClellan (2014) extends a similar recommendation to institutional music departments, whilst Bennett, Knight and Li (2023) recommend that students' pre-HE work experiences should also be taken into account when preparing students for the workplace. With such recommendations in mind, the research question explored in this paper is 'How can instrumental teacher identities can be nurtured in young musicians as they transition from further education into higher music education?'

Materials and methods

The projects undertaken by each author are discussed in turn in relation to materials and methods. It is worth noting that participants are frequently referred to by year group. In England, years 1–3 of a 3-year undergraduate university degree equate to 'Levels' 4–6, of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree and Awarding Bodies (FHEQ). The majority of English conservatoires offer four-year undergraduate music degrees, with years 3–4 equating to Level 6.

Project 1

In September 2019, a new cohort of Y1 undergraduates embarked on a newly validated first-year pedagogy module at a UK conservatoire. The overarching aims of the module were to familiarise students with an important area of potential employment, build on any existing experience students might have in relation to facilitating musical learning in others, and support students in developing pedagogical knowledge and skills that would likely be useful in their future careers. Throughout the module, classical and jazz performers, composers and music technologists were brought together to form interdisciplinary groups and participate in workshop activities. Students would gain knowledge and awareness of global musical traditions and styles, whilst developing skills in conducting, facilitating group singing, improvising and composing. Through these activities, students would be taught how to use musical, verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to lead warm-ups, games and activities for individual learners and groups in educational and community settings. Students also attended lectures from visiting practitioners and were encouraged to critique the work of peers and professionals both during class and through video footage, and to reflect on their own professional development in relation to the module. All module activity took place within the conservatoire, forming a foundation from which students could extend their learning in real-life contexts later in their course.

Following ethical approval granted by the Academic Ethics Committee at the first author's institution, all Y1 students in attendance at the conservatoire's Welcome Week in September 2019 (94 of a possible 134 students representing 70% of the cohort) were offered the

opportunity to participate in the research. They were informed that participation would involve completing a questionnaire prior to the start of the module and making their personal written reflections during the module available for analysis by the researcher. In the knowledge that participation would be entirely voluntary, that their anonymity would be preserved throughout, and crucially, that their decision to participate (or not) would have no impact whatsoever on assessment outcomes, 94 students gave informed consent and completed a paper-based questionnaire during an in-person meeting. 70.4% of the sample (n=66) were classical performers; 9.6% (n=9) were jazz performers, 11.7% (n=11) were composers and the remaining 8.5% (n=8) were music technologists. Questions aimed to gather information regarding students' musical backgrounds, any previous experience of supporting the learning of children and young people, and their career aspirations.

Subsequently, in January 2020, the same group of participants were asked to contemplate and write about their learning to date, and consented to their reflective writing being accessed for research purposes. Participants were asked to consider the extent to which they felt the module had supported them to build on existing skills or develop new ones, how they saw their role as a musician impacting positively on the lives of others, and whether their career aspirations had evolved as a result of their participation in the module.

When analysing the questionnaire data, statistical calculations were undertaken in Microsoft Excel and converted into graphs and charts. The qualitative data from the participants' written reflections were read multiple times for familiarisation prior to being transferred into a spreadsheet to facilitate manual line-by-line thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012), whereby codes were assigned to segments of text. Subsequently, it was necessary to group related codes together and eliminate overlapping ones. Throughout the results and discussion, alphanumeric codes are used to anonymise participant responses relating to Project 1, with part of the code relating to the students' principal study specialism, for example 76V19 = participant no 76, violin, cohort 2019.

Project 2

Project 2 derives from research undertaken by the second author during a six-month period in 2020 where undergraduate music students at English universities and conservatoires were invited to participate in a study of instrumental teaching via a nationwide survey. (For comparative purposes, the findings presented in this article relate to the data gathered from university students.) The aim of the study was to further understandings of routes into instrumental teaching in England by exploring the experience of undergraduate music students both as instrumental students and early career instrumental teachers. It explored

undergraduate music students' involvement in providing instrumental tuition, including how they began teaching, and how they develop professional and practical understandings of the role of instrumental teacher.

An explanatory sequential design (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006) was employed where quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed in two consecutive stages, with the subsequent qualitative data set being utilised to expand upon and further explain the initial quantitative data. The second author's decision to combine an online questionnaire with individual interviews provided an opportunity for both broad exploration of phenomena and individual lived experience of participants (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011).

After gaining ethical approval from their institution's Faculty Ethics Committee, the second author distributed information about the study to university music department representatives across England, inviting them to share a link to an online questionnaire with current students, who would be offered the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding whether or not to participate. The second author also sent the online questionnaire link to undergraduate music students at their own institution, whilst the UK Musicians' Union shared the participant information and questionnaire link with all student members.

Participants were informed that their anonymity would be preserved, with categories such as age, year of study and type of institution being used for administrative purposes only: no other identifiable information was gathered. The survey comprised 20 questions. Eleven of these invited participants to comment on their own experiences of being taught in instrumental lessons, any prior experiences of teaching other learners, and their views of instrumental teaching as a potential professional role, including whether they had previously been offered the opportunity to teach, or considered it as a career pathway. Participants who had previously taught were invited to express their personal feelings about their teaching experiences, to describe how they started teaching; the type of teaching and setting involved (for example one-to-one, small group, whole class, private studio, school-based) and how they formed teaching strategies.

A sample of 92 university students completed the online survey. Participants ranged in age from 18–57 years, with the majority (82.6%) aged between 18–21 years. Of the 92 university participants, distribution across year groups was as follows: Foundation year – 1 (1%); Y1 - 39 (42.4%); Y2 - 32 (38.4%); Y3 - 15 (6.3%); Y4 - 5 (5.43%). In contrast to conservatoire undergraduate courses which are mostly four years' duration, undergraduate university

degree courses in England are usually completed in three years. Therefore, it is possible that those university students who identified as Y4 students had completed a foundation year prior to their degree, were studying part-time, or had taken time out of their studies at some point.

For clarity, it is worth noting that the overall sample size of 92 was reduced for certain questions. For example, the survey design allowed participants who had not delivered or received instrumental tuition to skip questions relating to those specific areas. To avoid ambiguity, responses to questions completed by the majority of participants are expressed as overall percentages. Elsewhere, however, the specific sample size and number of responses are indicated. When citing responses from the survey data, these are discussed generally rather than being attributed to individual participants, hence no alphanumeric codes are given.

Towards the end of the survey, participants were invited to volunteer to participate in an interview study to discuss their responses further. Subsequently, eight undergraduate music students from universities across England gave informed consent to take part in a semi-structured interview. Of these eight participants, distribution across year groups was as follows: Y1: 2 students; Y2: 3 students; Y3: 3 students. The interviews, based around emerging themes from the questionnaire, included prompts as opposed to specific questions. This approach allowed the eight participants the freedom and flexibility to elaborate on their previous survey responses and share their individual lived experiences and perceptions with the researcher. All interviews were conducted online during the Covid 19 pandemic, and recorded with participants' consent. Recordings were transcribed and sent to participants for verification before analysis began. As with Project 1, manual line-by-line thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to identify key themes (Creswell, 2012). To protect anonymity, alphanumeric codes (e.g., U1 = University interviewee 1) are applied when quoting these participants.

Intriguingly, the themes emerging from Project 1 were reminiscent of findings from research undertaken by Creech and Papageorgi (2014) where perceived characteristics of ideal instrumental teachers were categorised under four overarching themes: personal skills, social skills, musicianship skills and teaching skills. Following analysis of Project 1 participants' written reflections, a total of 64 codes were generated, and these were grouped subsequently into five categories: 'developing skills', 'developing qualities', 'developing awareness', 'developing behaviours' and 'developing values'. The dominant themes emerging from the Project 2 data, following the identification of 18 sub-themes) related to: i)

participants' experiences of receiving instrumental tuition; ii) participants' own experiences of teaching; and iii) the extent to which instrumental teaching featured in participants' career plans. Discussion of the findings adopts a holistic approach, whilst alternating between projects to draw comparisons and highlight differences.

Results and discussion

Prior experiences of receiving instrumental tuition

Participants studying at conservatoires (Project 1) and universities (Project 2) offered an indication of their experience of being recipients of instrumental (or equivalent specialism) lessons prior to commencing their undergraduate studies. Across the Project 1 sample of 94 Y1 conservatoire students, 78% had been musically educated wholly or partially in England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales with music education backgrounds from 15 other countries across five continents contributing to the diversity of the cohort. While Project 2 participants were all studying in England at the time of the study, it was not clear where they had received their pre-HE musical education.

The majority of Project 1 participants accessed musical training in their principal study specialisms via multiple routes, gathering collaborative experiences through learning in groups and ensembles. However, 17% of participants (n=16) had experienced only one mode of musical learning, with 2.12% (n=2) having been self-taught (music technologists), 2.12% (n=2) having been taught wholly in small groups (composers), and the remaining 11.7% (n=11) having only ever received individual tuition. Indeed, one-to-one tuition appeared to have been the most prevalent means through which this conservatoire cohort had gained skills in their principal study specialism prior to commencing their undergraduate studies: 90.42% (n=85).

A similarly high percentage of Project 2 participants 93.5% (n=86) had received instrumental tuition on at least one instrument in school or in less formal settings including the teachers' homes, private studios or the students' homes. Of these participants, 64.9% (n=50) had only ever experienced one-to-one instrumental lessons, while 32.4% (n=25) had received a combination of group and individual tuition, commonly beginning with the former and progressing to the latter.

Prior experience of teaching others

A significant proportion (81%) of the Project 1 sample (n=76) reported pre-HE experience of supporting the musical learning of children and young people. Indeed, many students claimed to have been involved in facilitating musical learning by helping an experienced

practitioner during their school years. Of a range of activities (see Figure 1), ‘supporting younger players in an ensemble’ was the most frequently reported, closely followed by ‘helping in a local school’, with ‘instrumental/vocal teaching’ and ‘leading/assisting with music workshops’ ranking equally in third place. Most participants became involved in some form of teaching activity between the ages of 14–18, with the largest number (50% - n=47) commencing such activity from the age of 16. A small number of participants (13.8% - n=13) recalled helping in education settings even before the age of 13.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE]

Similarly, Project 2 survey participants were asked to detail prior experiences of instrumental teaching. Of 83 responses to this question, 45.8% (n=38) participants had previously delivered instrumental tuition while 54.2% (n = 45) had not. Of the 38 participants with prior teaching experience, 33 offered further detail regarding the type of tuition offered: 27 had delivered one-to-one tuition only, whilst 11 had delivered both group and individual tuition. These experiences ranged from voluntary work experience initiatives and peer mentoring opportunities facilitated by schoolteachers to paid private teaching or employment by music services, schools and arts organisations. Of the 45 participants who stated that they had not previously taught others, 32 suggested that they had not yet been offered or found any teaching opportunities, though 27 would consider teaching if opportunities arose.

Of the eight Project 2 interview participants, five had been involved in providing peer-to-peer teaching in schools, commonly arranged by a classroom music teacher, head of music or instrumental teacher. This experience tended to involve the participant in providing one-to-one or small group tuition for younger, less advanced pupils. Four participants had also been involved in ensemble direction or delivering support in theory classes, in some cases acting as an assistant to the classroom teacher. Informal arrangements involving the delivery of instrumental tuition for friends, neighbours or family members were also reported. Three of the interview participants had undertaken paid regular teaching whilst at school. One Y2 university student (U3) had worked as a private piano teacher, providing individual one-to-one tuition from the age of 12. Having already participated in peer-to-peer tuition at school, U3 agreed to teach a neighbour’s child and from there, developed a significant teaching practice, providing tuition to students of various ages and entering them for graded examinations. This student subsequently spent a gap year working as an instrumental teacher.

Evidently, a high proportion of students had engaged in prior teaching experiences during the pre-HE years. These opportunities to explore and experiment with 'provisional [teacher] selves' offers the potential for students to develop key understandings, beliefs, strategies and attributes relevant to professional identity in this context (Ibarra, 1999).

Early instrumental teaching experiences and strategies employed

The Project 2 survey asked participants who had already delivered tuition to explain how they devised teaching strategies as beginner teachers. A largely 'teach-as-taught' approach was revealed, akin to that described by Shaw (2023c) where employers perceived that music graduates' teaching was informed principally by their own learning experiences and the approaches employed by their former instrumental teachers. Indeed, some participants' teaching strategies appeared to be somewhat restricted, for example, '*I usually base my teaching methods [on] grades students wish to take and follow the exam board guidelines'.* Approaches such as these resonate with studies by Chappell (1999: 253) who reported that examinations often became 'the main focus of lessons' and Goddard (2002: 245) where 'success is usually judged by the number of examination certificates amassed', perhaps suggesting that instrumental teaching strategies have not developed significantly in the two decades since these papers were published. Nevertheless, other students' responses demonstrated an awareness of the need to be flexible and tailor teaching to learners' needs, as one survey participant shared, '*I drew on my experience of my various tutors and tried to use strategies that I felt worked, […] although my teaching is adapted to suit each individual'.* Another participant, who formed the basis of their teaching on their own learning experiences, claimed that they *'added on things I wish I'd known [when] I was learning'.*

The Project 2 interview responses were similarly revealing, for example, participant U2 '*tried to imitate'* their own teachers and the way they '*structured lessons'.* Similarly, U7 shared: *'I took tips and advice from my instrumental teachers'* with group singing lessons being *'a big copy and paste of my music teacher at school'*, and '*stealing'* their teacher's lesson structures and warm up strategies and '*sharing*' what had previously worked for them as a pupil of their former instrumental teacher. In contrast, interviewee U3 admitted that in the early stages of teaching, *'I felt out of my depth'* and *'learnt how to teach through teaching',* using their own experience of receiving instrumental tuition as a guide. Equally, participant U8, felt '*lost*' and did not know how to approach an individual flute lesson when teaching a friend, in contrast to their involvement in a peer-to-peer teaching, where '*everything was set up*' by their school music teacher, who provided guidance and support throughout the teaching process. As a result of experiencing teaching both with and without support from a more experienced practitioner, participant U8 suggested that before giving individual

instrumental lessons in the future they would seek out relevant training rather than *'making it up as I go along'*.

Evidently, for some Project 2 participants, former school music teachers and instrumental teachers had been significant figures and professional role models. In six interviews, participants revealed that they had continued to receive teaching advice and teaching opportunities from former instrumental teachers. Nevertheless, the relevance of early voluntary or paid opportunities in relation to possible future employment as music educators often appeared to be overlooked with participants perceiving themselves as 'helping' (as opposed to teaching). As participant U8 intimated: *'because it's not been formal, I don't see it as [teaching] experience'.*

Many of the examples above highlight the significant role of university and conservatoire students' own former and/or current instrumental teachers in providing a model, not simply in relation to practical skills, but also in professional practice. The instrumental teacher as 'possible self' (Markus and Nurius, 1986; Creech and Papageorgi, 2014; Rowley, 2019) evidently had a significant impact on student understandings of teaching and learning in this context. In terms of teacher identity development, such approaches resonate with Triantafyllaki (2010) who, as noted above, suggested that individuals are closely influenced by prior learning and interactions with previous teachers. However, in cases where students still lacked confidence, impostor feelings (Shaw, 2024) may have been present.

Perceptions about careers involving instrumental teaching

Conservatoire student (Project 1) participants were asked to identify their career aspirations via a questionnaire. Despite the 81% of participants with prior experience of facilitating musical learning in children, few appeared to aspire to become music educators in the future. As Figure 2 illustrates, solo performance was given the highest ranking overall (38.3%) with other performance careers in close proximity. However, rankings for careers in music education were significantly lower: classroom teaching (2.1%), instrumental teaching (1.1%) and music workshop leading (0.0%). More positively, however, educational/community activity did appear amongst students' 1–5 rankings in 74.5% of cases, a statistic that concurs with Project 2. Nevertheless, when considering what they were most looking forward to during their course, only one Y1 participant appeared to be interested in learning how to '*improve teaching [and] engage people*' in music making (22C19) despite the cohort's shared prior experience of doing just that.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE]

Similarly, instrumental teaching was not an appealing career prospect for many Project 2 (university student) participants, who tended to think of instrumental teaching as a secondary or 'fall-back' option (Bennett, 2012, p. 11). Many of the survey participants described instrumental teaching as *'bread and butter'* in terms of the financial security afforded as a part of a more precarious career plan, using expressions such as '*a necessary source of income',* a way '*to pay the bills, 'a backup plan', 'secondary career',* or simply something to do *'on the side'* while pursuing other roles in music.

It is possible that these beliefs, values and understandings of musicians' careers and (arguably hegemonic) attitudes towards instrumental teachers' professional identities may have been transmitted via Communities of Practice. Indeed, some of these responses resonate with the 'identity defence' phenomenon described by Illeris (2018) in that several musicians did not appear to view themselves as teachers first and foremost, at least not at this early stage in their professional development. There is also some synergy with Shaw (2023c), who found that employers of graduate instrumental teachers were keen to encourage music students to view instrumental teaching as a means to career progression as opposed to just a 'stopgap', 'something they might do on the side' or (with wording reminiscent of the Project 2 participants) a 'way to pay the bills' (p.288–289). Indeed, employers even suggested that many music students and graduates see instrumental teaching as an easy option, underestimate how skilled the best instrumental tutors are, and lack interest in, or do not seem to understand the importance of, investing in being the best teacher they can be. Conversely, even though many Project 2 participants had found their early teaching deeply rewarding in terms of helping others to progress and developing their own communication skills as teachers, they acknowledged a lack of confidence in their abilities, and suggested that they would need more experience and training before they could consider this form of activity a long-term professional goal. Whilst it is possible that these student teachers did not acknowledge the value of their 'provisional [teacher] selves' as being significant to their longer-term development as music educators, these first steps correspond with the 'processual' approach to identity development outlined by Bernard (2005) and Smilde (2009).

The written reflections submitted by Project 1 (conservatoire) participants in January 2020 following four months of participating in a Y1 pedagogy module at their institution, provided insights into their evolving attitudes about their roles as music educators. Building on their pre-conservatoire teaching experiences, students had engaged, alongside their peers, in interactive workshops led by music education professionals. Reflecting on these workshops

appeared to assist students' sense of 'becoming' a music educator themselves, whilst deepening their understanding of the skills required (Rowley, 2019). Eleven participants explicitly stated that the training received through the module had *'opened my eyes'* to teaching as a future career pathway, whilst the notion that the module had helped them to become *'a more open-minded musician'* was expressed by 55 participants. Others explained how the module had built on their previous teaching experiences and increased their confidence. Furthermore, through their Y1 pedagogical training, many students were able to see the role of an instrumental teacher as important to society. For example, a jazz guitarist who had previously worked in music education settings but had not previously considered a career in this field, appeared to have found a new sense of responsibility towards nurturing musical (and wider) skills in others:

> *The module […] introduced me to new ideas, which before coming to [conservatoire], I had not been aware of when teaching or leading group sessions. This made me begin to consider my role as musician not being solely as a performer. [Teaching] is not just restricted to improving a student's musicianship in a one-to-one context, but also as an enjoyable way of helping children develop key skills of interaction and confidence'* (11JG19).

Similarly, a double bass player who had previously worked as a mentor for younger musicians believed that the module had: *'not only enhanced my skills but helped to develop them, for example, [being] aware of the learners' needs before constructing an effective and appropriate lesson plan [and] not to be afraid to amend activities as the session unfolds'* (10DB19). The importance of flexible planning was also acknowledged by a pianist who had previously led a local church choir: '*While these sessions have been successful in the past, this module has encouraged me to […] plan the sessions more thoughtfully [,] engage eye-contact and listening skills, [and] be [more] flexible'* (36P19). Equally, a saxophonist commented that the module had helped them to broaden their outlook in relation to teaching, suggesting that they had become less reliant on their former teachers' one-to-one teaching approaches for inspiration and learned much about teaching from the prior experiences of their peers:

> *My musical ability has expanded [beyond my] Western Classical [training]. [I] feel more equipped to teach music lessons to larger numbers of children [and] have benefitted from working with a range of peers, especially international students and people outside [the woodwind] department. For example, when writing a children's*

song, it was very interesting to find out how other cultures approach musical education at a primary school level compared to England' (25S19).

Learning how to communicate professionally was also cited as a benefit, not least because it helped students to *'feel more […] professional'* following their transition from secondary school into conservatoire (8V19). On the subject of professionalism, a cellist admitted that the module had helped them to '*realise that [teaching] will be much harder than I originally perceived it to be [,] that people of different ages and abilities see things from a very different perspective to myself and that music can have a much bigger impact on people's lives than I expected*' (9VC19).

Significantly, all but one of the Project 1 participants appeared to recognise that they had a part to play in nurturing the next generation of musicians, with reflections including comments such as:

As a result of this module, I will certainly aim to teach music in some capacity during my career' (12JDK19).

I have learnt that even the best musicians work beyond the concert platform' (28019).

This module has made me aware of career options which previously I did not know were possible' (29O19).

While many Project 1 participants still placed emphasis on honing their skills in their specialist discipline, teaching was rarely discussed as fallback or 'bread and butter' activity, something that would be undertaken 'on the side', but instead as a vital, valuable vocation. Indeed, there appeared to be an emerging understanding of the role that music can play in young people's lives and an increased awareness of the importance of preserving musical experiences for all.

This module has helped me to understand what it means to be a well-rounded musician. It has also further affirmed my career aspirations: to be a composer whose music can be enjoyed by everyone, and to pass on the joy of music making to the next generations. I always think that teachers are very important; I am here right now because of the influences [of] wonderful teachers I had in the past. Therefore, being a teacher and composer who can use music to positively impact younger generations is something that I am aiming to achieve in life.' (90CP19).

It is noteworthy that 25.5% (n=23) of conservatoire student participants did not include any educational/community music activity whatsoever amongst their career aspirations when responding to the pre-module questionnaire, despite most participants having had some experience of supporting musical learning in young people before commencing their conservatoire studies. However, 86.9% (n=20) of this proportion of participants (all but 3) revealed in the written reflections that their career aspirations had changed as a result of studying the module, and that they now aspired to teach in some capacity in the future.

To summarise this section, the majority of participants represented across Projects 1 and 2 could be described as falling into one of the following categories:

a) students who have taught before with varying levels of experience, e.g., helping family and friends or mentoring peers (often attempting to replicate former teachers' one-to-one teaching methods – seemingly the most common method of teaching received by participants);

b) students had taught previously, but lacked confidence and would welcome formal training;

c) students who have not taught previously, but would like to if the opportunity arose;

d) students who had never taught previously and had no interest in teaching, but whose attitudes towards pursuing teaching as part of a portfolio career evolved positively as a result of pedagogical training.

Conclusions

The combined findings provide significant insights in relation to undergraduate music students' attitudes regarding becoming a music educator. Bringing the two projects together has enabled the authors to consider the research question: 'how can instrumental teacher identities be nurtured in young musicians as they transition from further education into higher music education?' Whilst the respective participant groups and data were not interrelated, there were interesting commonalities which highlighted aspects of undergraduate music students' pre-HE teaching experiences and the potential to build on them from the beginning of students' undergraduate training in music.

Whilst many university students had early access to the 'attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences' described by Ibarra (1999) in their own prior musical learning, which they then reproduced in explorations of 'provisional selves' through informal teaching interactions with family and friends, they did not seem to recognise the significance of these encounters. This suggests that early teaching experiences are not sufficient to nurture a secure professional identity as an instrumental teacher and highlights the need for further support. Indeed, many university students acknowledged gaps in their experience and expressed a positive desire for training of a more formal nature. In contrast, where conservatoire students had built on their pre-HE experiences through participating in a Y1 module involving work-based elements, they expressed an enhanced understanding of the significance of such encounters. Indeed, the conservatoire participants demonstrated that training as part of a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) involving students ('newcomers') and professional music educators ('old-timers') in Y1 can have a positive influence on students' desire to develop pedagogical knowledge, which in turn can facilitate the development of an instrumental teacher identity and associated career aspirations.

Discussion has been necessarily broad to encompass the main commonalities across the respective projects, and thus the authors acknowledge the limitations, not least that the projects were undertaken separately at a time when the authors were not aware of each other's work, and therefore the research methods presented in this paper are not entirely compatible. For example, whilst Project 1 involved a survey of cultural backgrounds, Project 2 did not; hence, future research could investigate the extent of international students' former teaching experiences and how these vary according to country of origin. Whilst Project 1 sought information about Y1 students' prior teaching experiences, it did not seek to uncover students' feelings about that experience, whereas Project 2 did just that. There is scope to examine the early teaching experiences of university and conservatoire students according to sociodemographic characteristics, year group, instrument, or other area of specialism (to include genres outside classical and jazz, for example popular music or global traditions). It would also be useful to consider the extent to which the diminishing 'pipeline' of music provision in England (Whittaker et al., 2023) might detract from the development of instrumental teacher identities.

Nevertheless, this comparison of the educative experiences of students from both conservatoires and university music departments suggests that Further and Higher Music Education Institutions could do more to develop instrumental teacher identities in their music students. As McClellan (2014: 303) states:

> It is imperative [to] engage the entire music department community in creating a supportive environment that encourages and shapes future music educators' identity as music teachers [,] empower[ing] prospective music teachers to think critically, develop creative independence in music teaching [and] construct beliefs about themselves as music teachers.

Whilst the research was conducted in England, the findings have implications for Higher Music Education Institutions internationally, and suggest strongly that there is significant scope to connect students' early teaching experiences as part of a pathway towards a career involving music education. We propose that investigating, acknowledging and building on the early teaching experiences of new undergraduate music students could help support their transition from Further to Higher Music Education. Equally, forming foundations for developing the future music education workforce from an early stage could encourage students to embrace a professional instrumental music teacher identity in the future.

Instrumental music teachers complement and expand the music provision available for children and young people in schools, and as such deserve to be appropriately trained, valued and appreciated. When this research was conducted, the Subject Benchmark Statement for Music in England (QAA, 2019) was due for imminent review and renewal, and it is hoped that in future, music education/music pedagogy will be featured more prominently in higher music education courses. If all conservatoires and university music departments in England were able to offer a pedagogy module in the first year of their undergraduate music degree courses (not to mention further pedagogical training with embedded opportunities to gain external work experience in subsequent years of the course) it could be possible to develop students' professional identities far beyond their 'provisional teacher selves'. Many Higher Music Education Institutions already collaborate with music education providers, but this type of provision could be more widespread, and build significantly on students' prior teaching experiences, no matter how informal these may have been. Greater numbers of students could be encouraged to question their assumptions about teaching careers and 'open their eyes' to a range of teaching methods, learning environments and pupil needs they may never have encountered before. In time, instrumental teaching may be viewed less as a fall-back career for musicians and more as an important responsibility, with, if not regulation, then at least closer monitoring and overview.

References

AEC (Association of European Conservatoires): Polifonia Working Group for Instrumental and Vocal Music Teacher Education (2010) *Handbook – Instrumental and Vocal Teacher Education: European Perspectives*. Brussels: AEC Publications.

Bartleet, B., Ballico, C., Bennett, D., Bridgstock, R. Draper, P., Tomlinson, V. and Harrison, S. (2019). Building sustainable portfolio careers in music: Insights and implications for higher education. *Music Education Research.* 21(3), 282–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1598348.

Barton, D. (2019) The Autonomy of Private Instrumental Teachers: its Effect on Valid Knowledge Construction, Curriculum Design, and Quality of Teaching and Learning. PhD Diss., Royal College of Music. https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.820158.

Bennett, D. (2012). *Life in the Real World – How to Make Music Graduates More Employable.* Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.

Bernard, R. (2005). *Making music, making selves.* Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education, 4 (2). http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bernard4_2.pdf

Blackstone, K. (2019) How do Conservatoire Graduates Manage their Transition into the Music Profession? Exploring the Career-Building Process. PhD Diss., University of Leeds. https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.800477.

Boyle, K. (2018) Understanding the Development of Professional Identity in Instrumental Teachers. EdD Diss., Canterbury Christ Church University. https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?did=1&uin=uk.bl.ethos.753505.

Boyle, K. (2021). *The Instrumental Music Teacher: Autonomy, Identity and the Portfolio Career in Music*. ISME Global Perspectives in Music Education. Abingdon: Routledge.

Boyle, K. (2024). Students as teachers: A study of UK undergraduate music students' experiences and perceptions of instrumental and singing teaching. Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 23(3), 214–232. https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222231213974

Burke Johnson, R. and Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014.

Burland, K. and Davidson, J. (2016). Tracing a musical life transition. In J. Davidson (ed.) *The Music Practitioner – Research for the Music Performer, Teacher and Listener* (2nd edn), pp. 225–50. London: Routledge.

Burt-Perkins, R. (2008). *Students at a UK conservatoire of music: Working towards a "diverse employment portfolio"?* In D. Bennett and M. Hannan (eds.) *Inside, Outside, Downside Up: Conservatoire Training and Musicians' Work,* pp. 49–60. Perth: Black Swan Press.

Canham, N. (2022). *Preparing Musicians for Precarious Work: Transformational Approaches to Music Careers Education.* New York: Routledge.

Chappell, S. (1999). Developing the complete pianist: a study of the importance of a whole brain approach to piano teaching, *British Journal of Music Education*, 16(3), 253–62. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051799000340.

Cohen–Scali, V. (2003). The Influence of family, social and work socialisation on the construction of the professional identity in young adults. *Journal of Career Development*, 29 (4), 237–249.

Creech, A. and Papageorgi, I. (2014). *Concepts of Ideal Musicians and Teachers: Ideal Selves and Possible Selves*. In I. Papageorgi and G. Welch (eds.) *Advanced Musical Performance,* pp. 99–113. Farnham: Ashgate.

Creswell, J. W. and Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research (4th edn).* Boston: Pearson.

DfE and DDCMS (Department for Education and Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport) 2022. *The Power of Music to Change Lives: A National Plan for Music Education.*

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-power-of-music-to-change-lives-a-national-plan-for-music-education.

Goddard, E. 2002. The relationship between the piano teacher in private practice and music in the National Curriculum. *British Journal of Music Education,* 19(3), 243–53. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051702000335.

Haddon, E. (2009). Instrumental and vocal teaching: how do music students learn to teach? *British Journal of Music Education*, 26(1), 57–70. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051708008279.

Haning, M. (2021). Identity formation in music teacher education: The role of the curriculum. *International Journal of Music Education*, *39*(1), 39–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761420952215.

Hennekam, S. and Bennett, D. (2017). Creative Industries work across multiple contexts: Common themes and challenges. *Personnel Review*, 46(1), 68–85. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-08-2015-0220.

Huband-Thompson, B., and Dawson, A. (2025). *Facing the Music: Meeting the ambitions of the National Plan for Music Education.* London: DEMOS. https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Music-Mark_Report_2025_Feb-2025.pdf

Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional Selves: Experimenting with Image and Identity in Professional Adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4), 764–791.

Illeris, K. (2011) *The Fundamentals of Workplace Learning: Understanding How People Learn in Working Life.* London: Routledge.

Illeris, K. (2018) *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists in Their Own Words* (2nd edn). Abingdon: Routledge.

Ivankova, N.V., Creswell, J.W. and Stick, S. L. (2006). Using Mixed–Methods Sequential Explanatory Design: From Theory to Practice. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05282260.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Latukefu, L. and Ginsborg, J. (2018). Understanding what we mean by portfolio training in music. *British Journal of Music Education*, 36(1), 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051718000207.

Long, M. (2016). Conservatoire students' attitudes, self-efficacy and aspirations. In M. Stakelum (ed.) *Developing the Musician: Contemporary Perspectives on Teaching and Learning. Sempre Studies in The Psychology of Music,* pp. 29–43. Abingdon: Routledge.

McClellan, E. (2014). Undergraduate music education major identity formation in the university music department. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 13(1), 279–309. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/McClellan13_1.pdf.

Markus, H. and Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist,* 41(9)*,* 954–969. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954.

Miller, J. and Baker, D. (2007). Career Orientation and pedagogical training: Conservatoire undergraduates' insights. *British Journal of Music Education*, 24(1), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051706007194.

Mills, J. (2004). Conservatoire Students as Instrumental Teachers. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, No.161/162, pp. 145–53. 20th ISME Research Seminar, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

Norton, N., Ginsborg, J. and Greasley, A. (2019). Instrumental and vocal teachers in the United Kingdom: Demographic characteristics, education pathways, and beliefs about qualification requirements. *Music Education Research,* 21(5), 560–581. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1656181.

Perkins, R., Aufegger, L. and Williamon, A. (2015). Learning through teaching: Exploring what conservatoire students learn from teaching beginner older adults. *International Journal of Music Education*, *33*(1), 80–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761414531544.

QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) (2019). *Subject Benchmark Statement: Music* (4th edn). Gloucester: QAA. https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-music.pdf?sfvrsn=61e2cb81_4.

Rowley, J. (2019). *The Musician as Teacher: Navigating Future Self for Career Development.* In J. Rowley (ed.) *Leadership of Pedagogy and Curriculum in Higher Music Education,* pp 150-169. New York: Routledge.

Shaw, L. (2023a). 'If you're a teacher, you're a failed musician': exploring hegemony in a UK conservatoire. *Research in Teacher Education*, 13(1)m 21–27. https://doi.org/10.15123/uel.8w732

Shaw, L. (2023b). Conservatoire students' perspectives on instrumental music teacher education: 'Developing Pedagogical Knowledge' (DPK) for the future music education workforce. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, 50(1), 155–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2023.2228233

Shaw, L. (2023c). Preparing conservatoire students for the music education workforce: institutional and industrial perspectives on instrumental teacher education in England. *Music Education Research*, 25(3), 280-293. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2023.2222277.

Shaw L. (2024). Preparing conservatoire students for the music education workforce: conversations with alumni. *British Journal of Music Education*, 41(3), 292–304. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051724000111.

Smilde, R. 2009. *Musicians as Lifelong Learners: Discovery through Biography*. Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers.

Toyne, S. 2025. How to staff music in secondary schools? *Music Teacher* magazine: https://www.musicteachermagazine.co.uk/content/feature/how-to-staff-music-in-secondary-schools/

Triantafyllaki, A. 2010. Performance Teachers' identity and professional Knowledge in advanced music teaching. *Music Education Research*, 12(1), 71–87.

UK Music (2022). *This Is Music 2022*. https://exxfmt5ydc6.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/This-Is-Music-2022.pdf.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E. (2018) A social theory of learning. In K. Illeris. *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists in Their Own Words* (2nd edn), pp. 219–28. Abingdon: Routledge.

Whittaker, A., Shaw, L., and Fautley, M. (2023) Pipelines in Music Education. *Music Teacher Magazine*, 102(7). https://www.musicteachermagazine.co.uk/features/article/pipelines-in-music-education.

Zhukov, K. (2019). Identifying Skills for Successful Classical Music Careers: Implications for Higher Education Studio Teaching Leadership. In J. Rowley (ed.) *Leadership of Pedagogy and Curriculum in Higher Music Education,* pp. 115–132. New York: Routledge.

LIST OF FIGURES: