

Research on the balancing mechanism between "teacher-training orientation" and "professional specialization" in higher music education

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Abstract: The long-standing dichotomy between "Teacher-Training Orientation" and "Professional Specialization" presents a central challenge in higher music education. This theoretical study seeks to move beyond this binary opposition by proposing an integrative balancing mechanism. It begins by delineating the core concepts of both orientations, rooted in relevant educational philosophies, particularly David J. Elliott's praxial music education and Lee Shulman's concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). The paper then analyzes the inherent complementarity and practical tensions between cultivating expert musicians and effective music educators. The core of the argument lies in constructing a multi-dimensional balancing framework encompassing integrated curriculum design, reflective pedagogical practices, diversified assessment systems, and collaborative institutional culture. The study concludes that a synergistic paradigm, which views professional artistry and pedagogical competence as mutually reinforcing, is essential for preparing music educators capable of thriving in the 21st century.

Keywords: higher music education; teacher-training orientation; professional specialization; balancing mechanism; pedagogical content knowledge (PCK); curriculum integration

1 Introduction

Higher music education globally grapples with a fundamental tension: the imperative to produce highly skilled musicians versus the responsibility to prepare competent music educators [1]. This tension is often framed as a conflict between "Professional Specialization"—emphasizing performance virtuosity, compositional technique, and deep musicological knowledge—and "Teacher-Training Orientation"—focusing on pedagogical methods, curriculum development, and educational psychology [2]. The historical separation between conservatory training and university-based teacher education programs has further institutionalized this divide, resulting in graduates who are either artistically accomplished yet pedagogically unprepared or pedagogically aware but artistically deficient—thereby failing to inspire students effectively [3].

The contemporary landscape of music education demands a resolution to this dichotomy. Schools and communities require music teachers who are both proficient educators and passionate, active musicians—ones who can model artistic excellence and engage students in meaningful musical experiences. Therefore, the central research problem addressed in this paper is not simply the existence of this tension, but the need for a systematic approach to harmonizing these dual aims. This conceptual study aims to propose a coherent balancing mechanism. It involves a theoretical exploration of how

"Teacher-Training Orientation" and "Professional Specialization" can be reconceptualized as complementary forces in curriculum design, pedagogical practices, assessment strategies, and institutional culture.

This paper will first clarify the conceptual boundaries of the two orientations and establish a theoretical framework. Subsequently, it will analyze the synergies and conflicts between them. The primary contribution lies in the detailed elaboration of a multi-faceted balancing mechanism, concluding with a discussion on the challenges and implications of implementing such an integrative model.

2 Conceptual definitions and theoretical framework

A precise understanding of the core concepts is foundational to this inquiry.

2.1 Teacher-training orientation

In the context of higher music education, "Teacher-Training Orientation" extends beyond generic pedagogical skills. It encompasses the specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to effectively facilitate musical learning in others. This includes:

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) for Music: Adapting subject matter knowledge (e.g., music theory, performance technique) into forms that are pedagogically powerful and adaptable to the diverse needs of learners [4]. For instance, knowing how to break down a complex rhythmic pattern for a beginner orchestra.

Curriculum and Assessment Literacy: The ability to design, implement, and evaluate music curricula that align with educational standards and foster sequential learning.

Understanding of Learner Development: Insight into the developmental aspects (cognitive, emotional, social) of children and adolescents as it relates to musical engagement.

2.2 Professional specialization

"Professional specialization" refers to the cultivation of high-level musical expertise and artistry. It is characterized by

- **Technical Proficiency:** the mastery of an instrument, voice, or compositional technique to a level of high artistic standard;
- **Comprehensive Musicianship:** a deep understanding of music theory, history, literature, and aural skills, enabling sophisticated musical interpretation and critical analysis;
- **Artistic Identity:** the development of a unique artistic voice and the capacity for creative expression and critical judgment in music.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The philosophy of praxial music education, as articulated by David J. Elliott, provides a robust foundation for integration [5]. It posits that music is an activity, a "doing" rather than merely an object. From this perspective, music teaching and music making are intertwined forms of praxis—reflective action aimed at achieving a worthwhile goal. Therefore, preparing a music educator is not about adding pedagogy to musicianship; it is about developing a distinct dimension of musicianship—teaching-oriented musicianship.

Furthermore, Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) offers a critical lens. For music educators, PCK represents the synthesis of "Professional Specialization" (content knowledge) and "Teacher-Training Orientation" (pedagogical knowledge). This synthesis creates a unique professional knowledge base that is distinct from that of a performer or a generic pedagogue.

3 The interrelationship and tension between the two orientations

The relationship between these orientations is marked by both symbiosis and strain.

3.1 Complementarity

A strong "Professional Specialization" provides the essential raw material for effective teaching. A teacher with deep musical understanding can enrich students with vivid examples, refine their skills through precise coaching, and inspire them with personal artistry. Conversely, a solid "Teacher-Training Orientation" ensures effective transmission of expertise. The ability to analyze one's own artistic process is crucial for teaching it to others, indicating that pedagogical training fosters greater self-awareness and artistry in musicians.

3.2 Manifestations of tension

Despite their complementary potential, practical challenges emerge in implementation. These include:

Curricular Time Constraints: The substantial time demands of individual practice and ensemble rehearsals frequently conflict with the requirements of pedagogical coursework and field placements.

Differing Epistemologies and Values: Conservatory culture typically prioritizes individual artistic achievement, while teacher education emphasizes collaboration, inclusivity, and student-centered learning. This can create potential identity tensions for students navigating both domains.

Assessment Disparities: Evaluation in "Professional Specialization" often centers on outcome-based summative assessment (e.g., a jury evaluation), while "Teacher-Training Orientation" frameworks prioritize formative, process-oriented assessment, systematically evaluating instructional planning, pedagogical decision-making, and measurable student learning outcomes across authentic classroom contexts.

4 Constructing a balancing mechanism: a multi-dimensional framework

Achieving balance requires intentional design across multiple dimensions of the educational system.

4.1 Integrated curriculum design

Moving beyond curriculum silos, an integrated curriculum intentionally connects music and education.

Methodology Courses as Integration Hubs: Courses like "String Techniques and Pedagogy" or "Vocal Pedagogy" should be co-taught or designed by faculty who embody both musical artistry and pedagogical practice, explicitly linking performance technique to teaching strategies.

Sequenced Field Experiences: Early and sustained field experiences, beginning in the first year, allow students to immediately connect their emerging musicianship to teaching contexts, reinforcing the relevance of both domains.

4.2 Reflective pedagogy and learning experiences

Pedagogical approaches must cultivate a reflective engagement with the dialectical relationship between making and teaching music.

Practice-based Learning: Implementing micro-teaching sessions where students teach a musical concept to their peers, followed by reflective critique to build PCK in an authentic setting.

Artist-Teacher Mentorship: Students should be guided by faculty who are recognized both as accomplished musicians and dedicated educators, in order to cultivate the comprehensive qualities they aspire to develop.

4.3 Diversified and authentic assessment

Assessment must value both artistic and pedagogical competence.

Portfolio Assessment: A culminating teaching portfolio can include video recordings of both teaching demonstrations and musical performances, along with lesson plans and reflective commentaries, providing a holistic picture of students' integrated abilities.

Authentic Performance Tasks: Performance juries could include a session where students verbally articulate the technical and musical choices they made, demonstrating their ability to analyze and explain their artistry—a core teaching

skill.

4.4 Fostering a collaborative institutional culture

Structural collaboration is key to sustaining the mechanism.

Inter-Departmental Initiatives: Joint appointments, shared curriculum committees, and collaborative research projects between music and education departments can break down silos and create a shared vision.

Cultivating the "Scholar-Teacher-Artist" Model: The institution should recognize and reward faculty who successfully integrate performance, scholarship, and teaching, thereby fostering the values the program seeks to instill in its students.

5 Challenges and future directions

Implementing this balancing mechanism faces significant challenges, including entrenched faculty attitudes, resource limitations, and the inertia of traditional accreditation standards. Future research should explore case studies of institutions successfully navigating these challenges and investigate the long-term impact of integrated programs on teacher retention and teaching effectiveness. Further refinement of the model for specific sub-disciplines (e.g., music technology, composition pedagogy) is also needed.

6 Conclusion

The perceived divide between "Teacher-Training Orientation" and "Professional Specialization" is a construct that higher music education can no longer afford to maintain. This paper has argued that the two are not mutually exclusive but are, in fact, mutually constitutive elements of a comprehensive preparation for music educators. The proposed balancing mechanism—rooted in integration, reflection, authentic assessment, and collaboration—provides a roadmap for transforming the curriculum and culture of music teacher preparation. By embracing a synergistic paradigm that fosters the development of the "artist-teacher", higher education institutions can better fulfill their mission to cultivate a new generation of music educators who are as passionate about teaching music as they are about making it, ensuring the vitality and relevance of music education for years to come.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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