Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education
Fall 2021 No. 230

Soft Hands: A Mid-Career Percussion Teacher's Professional Development Journey

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ABSTRACT

Professional development is an important part of any teaching career. Although it has been investigated within the field of music education, there is limited research on the experiences of mid-career music teachers from a first-person perspective, especially within a conservatory context. In this collaborative self-study, the authors analyze the professional development journey that one of them undertook as she followed a series of snare drum lessons to enhance her practice as a mid-career percussion teacher. Over a period of a year, the first author kept a research journal, working dialogically with a researcher to understand and extend these reflections. Using self-study as a systematic means of inquiry into practice, this article reveals the development of the first author's practical knowledge and subjective educational theory. Five themes encapsulate the findings: (i) although a learner by nature, going back to basics was a challenge; (ii) reflecting on learning prompted reflection on teaching; (iii) the importance of placing learning in a historical context and wider framework; (iv) taking care of students; and (v) with fresh eyes comes the need to keep focused. In presenting evocative accounts of lived experience, reflective and reflexive commentary, and critical reflection informed by literature, the results and discussion read as a through-composed narrative. This research offers insights to mid-career music teachers and their employers regarding the impact and design of professional development opportunities. It also demonstrates an approach to self-study that might be useful to others who want to undertake similar investigations of their practice.

BEGINNINGS

ANDREA: *Over the last 25 years, I have built a portfolio career as an orchestral and chamber musician and teacher. Currently, I teach one-to-one lessons and ensembles at two specialist EC-12 music schools, Chetham's School of Music and Junior Royal Northern College of Music, and a conservatory, the Royal Northern College of Music. Recently, there came a "critical phase" (Kelchtermans, 2014, p. 74) in my teaching that prompted me to act and ultimately led to this research. I had noticed that several of my orchestral percussion students, who also studied drum kit with Dave Hassell, had very secure, fluent technical facility on the snare drum.[1] Gradually, I came to realize that I could not offer any sig-*

nificant ways to improve their orchestral snare drum technique. I had reached the limit of my teaching ability in this area, even though in all other areas I was confident I could help students develop as performers, with a secure technical foundation that allowed them to express what they wanted musically. Of the many instrumental disciplines a percussionist has to master, I had always felt that snare drum was the area where I was least confident as a player and a teacher. While my lack of highly specialized snare drum knowledge had minimal impact on my professional playing life, I felt frustrated that it was hampering me as a teacher. This, alongside the offer of financial support for professional development from the Royal Northern College of Music, led to a series of six private lessons with Dave Hassell to investigate snare drum playing from a drum kit perspective. My initial idea was to have a lesson once every 2 or 3 weeks and see how my playing and teaching developed as a result. Six lessons became 16 lessons, and, over the course of a year, I kept a daily reflective practice journal to document my experiences.

My colleague John Habron helped me apply for the funding and invited me to consider framing my learning as a collaborative research project. John teaches undergraduate and graduate classes in music education and qualitative research methods, so this provided a source of support and collaboration that I hadn't previously considered. We discussed the possibilities and looked at various methodological approaches, including action research (McNiff, 2002) and autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2010). We eventually settled on self-study as a flexible approach to research that allows the writer to combine narrative elements with more formal reflection and analysis (Hamilton et al., 2008). As an entry-level researcher, self-study felt accessible, since it is a very pragmatic way to reflect on a change in one's professional approach.

Through discussions with John, it soon became clear that there were many potential aspects to the research, and gradually two separate, but interrelated, topics came into focus: my personal learning journey itself and the impact that applying this new knowledge would have on my students. The purpose of this qualitative self-study is to focus on the first of these, namely to investigate my experience of instrumental learning during this period of mid-career professional development from the point of view of my personal development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MUSIC EDUCATION LITERATURE

Professional development is an important part of any teaching career (Campbell et al., 2004). The responsibility for such development lies not only with the individual teacher, but also with employers, who should give "teachers opportunities to develop, implement, analyze, and modify new practices within the context of a professional community" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 832). Researchers sometimes distinguish between different models of professional development, ranging from those based on transmission, where training is "delivered" to practitioners (sometimes for credit, or in response to accountability measures), to those that promote transformative learning, with the practitioner enjoying increasing professional autonomy (Kennedy, 2005).

Researchers in music education have examined beginning teachers' experiences of professional development, focusing on topics such as undergraduate music education

students' perceptions of brass and woodwind techniques classes (Conway et al., 2007) and their occupational identity development in authentic learning contexts (Haston & Russell, 2012). However, Eros (2013) has noted that there is limited research on mid- or late-career music teachers (p. 59). An exception is Conway (2008), whose interviews of 19 experienced music teachers revealed that informal interactions with other music teachers were seen as the most effective form of professional development and that professional development needs might change over the course of a career. Baker (2005a, 2005b) has also investigated mid-career instrumental teachers, focusing on those working peripatetically and in music services. Bauer (2007) supports the need for research into this group of teachers, stating: "It is essential that additional research on all aspects of professional development for the experienced music teacher be conducted" (p. 19). This is important for practitioners and employers to learn about possibilities regarding the design and impact of professional development opportunities.

Research on professional development in music education uses a range of methodological approaches, including survey (Bowles, 2002), case study (Haston & Russell, 2012), and literature review (McClellan, 2011). University professors Pellegrino et al. (2019) used self-study to examine and improve their teaching practices in improvisation and composition, whereas in a teacher education self-study, Conway et al. (2010) investigated community-building among a group of music teachers and music teacher educators made up of undergraduate and doctoral students. Sometimes research into professional development focuses on an individual and thus provides a precedent for our approach in this article. For example, Conway and Christensen (2006) present a collaborative study of the latter's professional development when she was a newly qualified instrumental teacher in a middle school. Francis's (2012) first-person account of her identity transformation as an A-level music teacher details a compositional reawakening that had a transformational impact on how her students found meaning in their compositions while responding to exam board criteria.

There has been a recent expansion of academic writing on percussion, most notably in the *Cambridge Companion to Percussion* (Hartenberger, 2017a). The chapters in the book cover a range of topics from orchestral percussion and the development of percussion instruments to percussion in performance and world percussion. There are some references to music education, for example, African influences on Western pedagogy (Williams, 2017); however, these focus on the importance of understanding musical heritage rather than processes of teaching and learning per se. Similarly, while Knight (2014) explores trends and developments in band teaching methods, he does not investigate professional development for the teacher. Some research accounts by percussionists take a first-person perspective. Dylan Smith (2017) investigates his own embodied experiences as a rock drummer to arrive at what he calls "the essential nature of rock music." Based on an intense period of band rehearsal and performance, Dylan Smith finds meaning in the somatic and social nature of musicking, connecting mind and body, self and other, but his research does not relate to processes of teaching and

learning. In another autoethnography, Dunbar-Hall (2009) describes the experience of learning gamelan in Bali and the impact it, and the research process itself, had on his pedagogy at an Australian university. He considers specific ways of thinking and doing that profoundly altered his self-concept and practice as teacher, ethnomusicologist, and musician. While Dunbar-Hall (2009), along with Conway and Christiansen (2006) and Francis (2012), are in some ways related to this study, there is—to our knowledge—no published research that investigates the professional development journey of a mid-career instrumental teacher, especially in the context of orchestral percussion in a conservatory. Therefore, the research question motivating this study was: How does a mid-career percussion teacher make sense of her experiences of a self-initiated professional development journey?

SELF-STUDY AS AN APPROACH TO RESEARCH

To answer our research question, we used self-study (Loughran et al., 2004), a type of practitioner research that Dinkelman (2003) describes as the "intentional and systematic inquiry into one's own practice" (p. 8). Self-study aims to reveal the practical knowledge developed through working in a professional field. For Pinnegar (1998), self-study is "a methodology for studying professional practice settings" (p. 33). Self-study developed within the discipline of education studies, where it is sometimes known as self-study of teaching and teacher education practices (S-STEP; Loughran et al., 2004). LaBoskey (2004) states, "Research in teacher education is attempting to answer questions about how best to prepare new teachers and facilitate ongoing teacher development" (p. 818). While some self-studies in education focus on the first of these goals (investigating how to prepare new teachers), it is the second (investigating ongoing professional development) that concerns Andrea's learning and research journey.

Authors define self-study in various ways. For Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998), "Self-study is a research methodology in which researcher and practitioners use whatever methods will provide the needed evidence and context for understanding their practice" (p. 240). Building on this, LaBoskey (2004) tells us that self-study research encompasses such strategies as action research and autoethnography, and researchers can use multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative. Therefore, rather than a methodology, self-study might better be described as a "genre of educational research" (Tidwell et al., 2009, p. xiii). On the other hand, Hamilton et al. (2008) try to separate self-study, autoethnography, and narrative as distinct strategies of inquiry, while acknowledging there are commonalities between them. In yet another account, self-study is seen as a "tradition within participatory action research that purposefully fosters interrelatedness between our teaching and research" (Macintyre Latta & Buck, 2007, p. 189).

Despite these differences in interpretation, we call our research self-study, as it matches the five characteristics set out by LaBoskey (2004): (i) self-initiated and self-focused; (ii) improvement-aimed; (iii) interactive; (iv) includes multiple, mainly

qualitative methods; and (v) defines validity as a process based on trustworthiness. We did not conceive our project as action research, as it did not involve cycles of reflection focused specifically on Andrea's own teaching. Nor do we claim it as autoethnography, as it does not aim to reveal aspects of the cultures of which Andrea is a member, such as the world of percussion or the learning culture of the music conservatory. However, it does make use of the first-person perspective and, therefore, shares common ground with narrative and autoethnographic approaches.

Self-study in education is closely related to professional development. It has even been argued that self-study has inherent value as an approach to professional development (Cole & Knowles, 1995, p. 147). However, as Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) point out, this does not give sufficient grounds to publish a self-study. First, what is required is to be clear about what our data is, our process of analysis, and how we interpret our findings (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 853). Second, some argue that it is also necessary to "provide evidence of the value of the changes in our ways of being" (Feldman, 2003, p. 28). This implies an existential undertone in self-study, which echoes the fact that "for us to change how we teach requires us to change who we are" (Feldman, 2003, p. 27). Therefore, practitioner-researchers undertaking self-study ask questions relating not only to their practice (What works?), but also their values and beliefs (Who am I?), and they consider their responses to these questions in rigorous ways.

OUR APPLICATION OF SELF-STUDY

As qualitative researchers, we place ourselves within the interpretive, or constructivist, paradigm (Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013). That is, our lens on the world sees reality as something constructed through social processes of meaning-making that allow us to acknowledge the richness of context and the uniqueness of lived experience. Therefore, this conceptual underpinning is appropriate for a self-study aiming to understand the experiences of a teacher working in a particular learning and teaching ecology. Working with human participants also requires researchers to consider the ethics of their work. Although Andrea is the only participant in this study and is writing about herself, we thought about research ethics very carefully, as the act of reflecting on first-person experiences leads inevitably to vulnerability. This is crucial when a participant is not using a pseudonym and whose identity and places of work can be easily identified. Our careful approach also took into account her teacher, Dave Hassell, and how he is represented. To include him in the process, we showed him a draft of the article and asked for comment. To guide us, we used Tolich's (2010) recommendations for ethical practice in autoethnographic research, as they apply equally as well to other forms of first-person research. In these ways, we protected both Andrea and Dave from potential harm and gave them control over the representation of data. Dave also gave his informed consent to be named in the article. The Royal Northern College of Music Research Ethics Committee granted approval for this study on September 16, 2019.

In this article, we present (i) evocative accounts of Andrea's lived experience, from journal entries; (ii) her own reflective and reflexive commentary on her experiences; and (iii) jointly authored critical reflection, informed by literature. The data come from Andrea's personal journal (2017–2018), written over a period of 12 months. The use of journaling allows for the inclusion of emotion and the whole self in reflection and analysis (LaBoskey, 2004), adding to the authenticity of the narrative. Andrea took notes after each lesson and after her own practice sessions and performances. We met 12 times (typically for 90 minutes) to discuss these journal entries and took notes during our meetings to keep track of our developing understanding, but these notes were not regarded as additional data. Most of these meetings took place after Andrea had completed her journal. Through a dialogical process, we identified ways Andrea could extend and deepen her reflective and reflexive commentary through further writing. This approach follows the recommendations of Samaras (2011), who advocates for a critical collaborative approach to self-study wherein the teacher works alongside one or more critical friends who ask searching questions, provide constructive feedback, and present alternative views. In this way, teacher and critical friend positively exploit their different perspectives to arrive at new, shared understandings (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). This interactive process also aided the trustworthiness of the study by bringing a type of external scrutiny to Andrea's process of self-reflection (Feldman, 2003).

What follows are the results that emerged from Andrea's process of reflective writing through her journal data, our dialogues, and an extended period of joint analysis. Andrea analyzed her practice diaries and identified recurring and significant motifs in terms of her learning experiences by noting them in the margin. John analyzed the texts in the same way. We then compared our ideas by mind-mapping the motifs, removing redundant ones, and grouped them to create themes. We placed the themes in an order that conveyed the chronology of her learning over time. In these ways, we wanted to emulate Gouzouasis and Ryu (2015), who write: "Today, a qualitative researcher is invited to not only place themselves *in* the text but also to *problematize* the form of academic discourse itself, and to use alternative and engaging approaches to create an art of scholarly inquiry" (p. 402). In our case, we took an alternative approach to traditional qualitative data analysis (i.e., coding) by allowing our dialogical mind-mapping of the data to lead the process. Furthermore, we decided to engage our readers by emphasizing the temporal unfolding of Andrea's reflections on her professional development journey. In this way, we present the results and discussion as a through-composed narrative. Given the primacy of storytelling in self-study, it is no surprise that narrative forms of knowing are commonly used (LaBoskey, 2004). The five themes are: (i) although a learner by nature, going back to basics was a challenge; (ii) reflecting on learning prompted reflection on teaching; (iii) the importance of placing learning in a historical context and wider framework; (iv) taking care of students; and (v) with fresh eyes comes the need to keep focused. Andrea's journal entries are in italics with quotation marks

and the date of her entry included, her reflective and reflexive commentary is also in italics, and our joint writing is in a roman (normal) font.

THEME 1: ALTHOUGH A LEARNER BY NATURE, GOING BACK TO BASICS WAS A CHALLENGE

My first lesson is a stark wake-up call. It is quickly apparent that this will be a much longer-term project that will involve me going right back to basics and rebuilding my snare drum technique from scratch. Pretty much the only thing that does not need rethinking is the way I allow the sticks to rebound from the drum rather than "hitting in." Dave explains how every individual stroke can come from as far back as the deltoid muscles and that tension at any point along the shoulder/arm/wrist/fingers will transmit directly through the sticks and affect the tone of the drum. He introduces me to the traditional rudimental style of playing with forearm rotation rather than the wrist strokes I am used to and explains the importance of feeling the "zing" from the stick in your hand with every stroke.[2]

I go home wondering how I have managed to earn a living as a player and a teacher for more than 20 years when I have so much to learn. I commit to daily focused practice on this for as long as it takes. I want to feel confident and secure enough in the new techniques to be able to use them in my professional playing and to teach them effectively.

My initial practice sessions are challenging. I keep dropping my sticks and find it very hard to be a beginner again. It is so frustrating when I know what I want my hands to do but they don't do it. It is not a feeling I am used to. Even the most basic strokes feel so alien, and I have to keep going back to the video clips of Dave playing, which I recorded to remind me of the shapes as I practiced.

7/12/17: "Tired today . . . so decided to keep it simple with basic strokes at different dynamic levels, bounce, drop beats and down-up-tap [DUT] separate hands, brain froze when I tried to combine them."

7/30/17: "DUT hands together and separate—LH [left hand] feels a little awkward and not as smooth as RH [right hand]—go back to Dave's videos tomorrow to check it all over again."

I realize this will be a long process and that I could easily become disheartened or overwhelmed by it, so I make the decision to limit myself to 10 minutes focused practice every day so that the challenge is manageable.

By Lesson 3, I feel able to hold my sticks again and am really seeing the benefit of the regular timed practice. Dave highlights the importance of vocalizing musical lines as you play so that your focus is always on sound and music. Everything is about soft hands, fluid lines of movement, and allowing the weight of the stick and its natural rebound to do the work for you. I leave the lesson aware that yet again I have been pushed beyond where I have got to by just the right amount. This is such skilled teaching.

> *A few of my teaching and performing colleagues have expressed surprise that I was prepared to go "back to basics" and undertake a major technique change at this stage in my career. They suggested that I have made myself vulnerable by undertaking this professional development. I do not see it this way. The range of instruments in the percussion family is enormous and as players we are constantly learning how to play new instruments and new ways to approach familiar ones. I see this research as an extension of that process and just another step in my journey. I never set out to completely overhaul my playing with a major technique change; that has been a happy by-product of this research.*

This theme shows Andrea grappling with what it felt like to be a beginner when one is already an experienced musician and teacher. She felt dissociated from her practice ("Even the most basic strokes feel alien") and her "not knowing" is symbolized by continually dropping the sticks. Yet, seeking these lessons in the first place speaks to her self-confidence and ability to call her own "expert status" into question (Loughran, 2004). Her motivation to learn is supported by Eros (2013), who writes: "Second-stage music teachers should cultivate the habit of constant reflection with the conscious goal of seeking renewal and growth" (p. 71). Andrea's role in this process was to make the familiar strange, something that is recognized as part of the professional development of advanced practitioners (Fillery-Travis & Robinson, 2018). Through Andrea's willingness to lay her technique bare and be open to change, new practices and understandings began to emerge. As Howard et al. (2018) note, "In being exposed . . . we are open to self-understanding and to the possibility of change, growth and discovery" (p. 856). On the other hand, for an orchestral percussionist, a continual process of learning is required across a variety of instruments and throughout a career. As Cahn (2017) puts it, orchestral percussionists "make a significant commitment to learn to play a variety of percussion instruments at the highest technical level" (p. 22).

An important part of Andrea's fundamental reappraisal of her approach was how Dave encouraged her to pay attention to her body, which Habron-James (2020) describes as the first instrument (p. 86). This included releasing tension, the importance of which is advocated by other percussionists (Mixon, 2002; Stevens, 2004) and researchers focusing on injury prevention in musical performance (Kenny & Ackermann, 2015). Andrea's careful attending to sensation led to new embodied knowledge, especially of the hands and arms, and the felt sense of the new movements ("feeling the 'zing' from the stick"). Dave also incorporated vocalization into his pedagogy to maintain a connection with the world of sound and musical line. Vocalizing is part of teaching and learning in many different percussion traditions to aid the internalization of phrasing, shaping, and sound quality (Williams, 2017), as much as rhythmic patterns (Hartenberger, 2017b). The origins of contemporary percussion and ongoing oral traditions of teaching and learning make this a common feature of percussion pedagogy (Williams, 2017). By reconnecting with the basics (her body and voice), Andrea also had experiences that made her reflect on how she had learned as a student, as we explore in the next theme.

THEME 2: REFLECTING ON LEARNING PROMPTED REFLECTION ON TEACHING

So much of what I am learning is similar to the way I learned four-mallet marimba grip as a student of Liz Gilliver that I wonder why I have not spotted the links before.[3] *On reflection, I realize that the main difference is in the initial stages of learning. When I first learned to play snare drum I was taught to "hit" the drum in a certain place to get the right sound. Very little consideration was given to the type of strokes used and what was going on physically as I played. Other than allowing the sticks to bounce back off the drum and keeping my back fingers in contact with the stick, nothing was mentioned. I did not stop to think there might be more to it. By the time I reached conservatory, I had 5 years of learned habits in my snare drum playing that had started from the day I first picked up a pair of sticks. In stark contrast, I remember sitting in a college practice room after my very first four-mallet marimba lesson, poring over diagrams and complicated photographs in Legh Howard Stevens's (2004)* Method of Movement for Marimba. *I was being taught a new technique from scratch by an expert teacher, at a stage in my life where I was very open to new learning and keen enough to focus my practice accordingly. This is also how I am learning with Dave.*

This really brings home to me the importance of getting the fundamentals right with beginner students. I am very aware that there is a fine balance between encouraging mature, focused, repetitive practice and making learning fun. How do I help my younger students to engage with these concepts I am learning? How much of it is relevant at a beginner level? I realize that the first stage has to use clear, effective modeling and careful use of vocabulary, such as: playing *the drum rather than* hitting *it, keeping hands soft,* holding *the sticks rather than* gripping *them, and so on.*

I am also very aware that, originally, I thought my professional development—and this research—would be of most benefit to my Junior Royal Northern College of Music students rather than all my students. I find it is easy to make assumptions about how motivated and serious students are, or should be, based on where you teach them. This is something I still struggle with. I would expect a student at a specialist music school or junior conservatory to be more focused about their instrumental learning journey than one at a mainstream school, who does music as another hobby alongside sport, or art. However, the techniques and skills I am learning are relevant to all my students at some level. The challenge is that it requires such great understanding to differentiate and personalize for each pupil.

What I can be clear about is that my aim for all my students, regardless of where I teach them, or what "type" of student they are, is the same: to help them build a secure foundation for their playing and to equip them with the right tools to take them to whatever level they choose. Most importantly, I want to enthuse them with a lifelong passion for music that goes beyond any individual instrumental discipline.

12/6/17: "Teaching RNCM [Royal Northern College of Music] first-year undergraduates today saw huge improvement in students' roll sound based on supporting stick

properly, raising height of drum, and working with rebound rather than pushing into drum. This project is starting to make a real difference to my teaching now too."

The reflective work Andrea undertook during her professional development prompted her to compare her experiences with how she had been taught as a beginner. Related to this, she considered the sequencing of content in her own teaching ("How much of it is relevant at a beginner level?"), and her acknowledgment of the understanding required to "differentiate and personalize" reveals the learner-centered nature of her own approach to pedagogy (Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt, 2017). In reevaluating the language she uses in teaching, Andrea also shows her intention to bring the students' attention to their bodies ("keeping hands soft") and how they can monitor their playing using haptic feedback, in a similar way to Dave's approach to teaching her. In these ways, Andrea's pedagogical values rise to the surface. Another one of these values—instilling a lifelong orientation toward musical learning ("I want to enthuse them with a lifelong passion for music")—is recognized as an essential aspect of music pedagogy from the early years onward. As Pitts (2017) writes: "The best music education equips young people with the practical and discriminatory skills to continue their learning in any number of directions beyond and after school" (p. 161). Yet another pedagogical value is seen in the way Andrea asks questions of herself. This internal dialogue is a quintessential element of reflective practice (Tsang, 2007).

Therefore, Andrea's own learning journey not only developed her snare drum technique, but also revealed and confirmed aspects of her "subjective educational theory (the personal system of a teacher's knowledge and beliefs about teaching)" (Kelchtermans, 1996, p. 308). Her snare drum lessons, in the context of her ongoing teaching and the accompanying research, prompted reflection on pedagogy itself, especially the importance of good technique and a healthy approach to the instrument for beginner students. It is not that Andrea became a reflective practitioner as a result of this professional development journey (her initial motivation showed this was already the case), but that this preexisting practice had space to develop and deepen. Thus, we can understand ongoing reflective practice itself as a type of continuing professional development. For Andrea, this process was enhanced by Dave's integration of the percussion literature in the lessons.

THEME 3: THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACING LEARNING IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND WIDER FRAMEWORK

In addition to the practical side of our lessons, Dave always has another book or article for me to read that I "might find interesting." Lesson by lesson, he introduces me to history and practical tutor books by the great names in the snare drum world. The more I read the more I understand the heritage, traditions, and culture behind the practical skills I am learning.

I start to see how the different techniques fit together and to get an idea of the bigger picture. What I have always seen as "techniques for kit players" and "orchestral snare drum skills" all have their roots in rudimental drumming. It is interesting to note that this perceived divide between different styles of playing is not new. In the original introduction to the 1935 edition of Stick Control for the Snare Drummer*, Stone (2009) offers this:*

> *A WORD TO THE ORCHESTRAL DRUMMER—Do not let the word "rudimental" frighten you nor prevent you from putting in a normal amount of practise on power, high-handed practise and the open roll. This will not spoil the light touch, delicate shading or fine-grained effects demanded of you in modern musical interpretation. To the contrary, by giving you a better control of the sticks, it will enable you to produce even finer and more delicate effects than heretofore. (p. 4)*

On the other hand, in the foreword to Syncopated Rolls for the Modern Drummer*, Blackley (2016) cautions against getting too focused on the traditional rudimental side of technique: "Indeed a sound technique is essential to all musicians, but technique is for musical expression, not gymnastic performance. Try to think of singing and dancing, not marching."*

I appreciate that having the power to project your drum call across a noisy battlefield or lay down a heavy backbeat in a rock band may not rank highly on the average orchestral player's priority list. But when Dave likens it to having the power of a finely tuned sports car engine under your bonnet, I can see that the additional torque makes all your driving easier and more enjoyable. You also have the means to put your foot down and get yourself out of trouble easily when needed. This is reflected in my diary entries:

10/28/17: "Chops felt bombproof on stage today. Even the way I stand at the drum is different now—relaxed and confident. I know I still have a long way to go but it is lovely to have some confidence in what I'm doing. Really enjoyed playing tenor drum in Pirates *[*Pirates of the Caribbean Orchestral Suite *(Zimmer, 2019)*]*. I knew how to get a full sound from the drum and plenty of volume without smacking it. Very positive experience!"*

*12/9/17: "*The armed man: A mass for peace *(Jenkins, 1999) gig. Felt confident and happy playing, placement [within the percussion section] was easier as had nerves of steel. Partly due to good team and partly confidence in my playing ability. Loved the feeling of opening up the throttle for loud playing at the end on field drum. Technically, I was more secure and able to think consciously about soft hands during gig and hear the sound quality change on drum. Never been that relaxed playing snare in a gig before. Need to make it totally consistent now and like a default setting rather than having to remind myself in the gig."*

Dave Hassell shared and recommended a variety of important texts to enrich Andrea's understanding (Bailey, 1999; Circone, 2000; Clark, 2011; Gathreaux, 1989; Hassell, 2007; Hessler, 2017; Lefèvre, 1979; Stone, 2009). Reading about the history of snare drum technique added a new dimension to her learning. This led to a revised notion of technique and its origins and applications ("What I have always seen as 'techniques for kit players' and 'orchestral snare drum skills' all have their roots in rudimental drumming"). Even though it was not articulated explicitly, we can see in Andrea's pedagogy a responsiveness to the principles of historically informed performance (Butt, 2002), such as understanding the social contexts in which snare drums have been constructed and played. Through contextualizing Andrea's performance practice historically, Dave also exposed an artificial divide between different percussion disciplines (kit and orchestral). In other words, his own research provided "the necessary teaching material for the arrangement of stylistic matters within musical studies" (Mateos-Moreno & Alcaraz-Iborra, 2013, pp. 246–247). Andrea's new historical awareness reinforced her increasing control of the snare drum. This connected to an increased confidence and enjoyment, experienced physically as a changed stature and a relaxed body, and expressed verbally in the imagery of driving a finely tuned sports car. The potential of carefully chosen images and analogies would come to play an important role in Dave's teaching and Andrea's understanding.

THEME 4: TAKING CARE OF STUDENTS

Dave often mentions his teacher Jim Blackley in our lessons. Today he shared Jim's rewire analogy that really resonated with me both in my recent experiences as a learner and in my role as a teacher, which is where this whole project began. Jim likens learning a new snare drum technique to rewiring a house: You need to know where you want the sockets and switches first, then get the wires in place, then replace all the sockets before you flip the switch. In other words, I did not want to go on stage and play the snare drum part of Scheherazade *(Rimsky-Korsakov) in the middle of a major technique change. At the start of this project, I knew some of my sockets and switches were not in quite the right place, but I hadn't realized what a major job the rewire was. Two years on, I am still having lessons. I now find myself naturally shifting my focus from personal understanding and playing to considering when and how my new knowledge can be applied to my teaching in a structured, coherent, and meaningful way for my students.*

As I figure out what to teach and when, I am very aware of the rewire analogy and am still sorting the information and techniques into a logical teaching progression in my mind. I appreciate that each student will have their own needs and the material will be more relevant to some than others, as it requires very focused practice. While I might not want to explore such in-depth technical focus with a young beginner student, these concepts do need to be embedded from the very start of

a student's learning journey. I also need to be certain that, if I start a "rewire" with one of my students, I have the necessary teaching skills and understanding to see the process through to the end. I feel a very strong duty of care toward my students, so choosing wisely when to "flip the switch" is crucial. This is about not doing harm. So, as I practice and continue to apply my new knowledge in my own playing, I find myself thinking about whether, how, and when these ideas should be presented to my students.

02/08/18: "RNCM technical assessments today, good to see some of my technical help put into practice by a first-year student, but interesting to see how old habits die hard under pressure. Watching the snare technique of second-year students who I saw last year, it is interesting that there is only a little progression there whereas tuned four-mallet technique has improved a lot. How much of what I am covering now is appropriate and realistic for these students? I know I couldn't have coped well with it at their stage at college. I didn't have enough background in good technique and learning/practice skills to get my head round it. Is it the same for them or should we be forcing the issue?"

05/16/18: "Kept coming back to soft hands and it struck me how much that phrase features in my personal practice notes, but it should feature more in my teaching."

Dave Hassell is not only one of the country's leading experts on snare drum and stick technique and a master technician, he is also a very wise and gifted teacher. The experience of being taught by him and the patience and understanding he shows in introducing new concepts and pacing lessons gives me much to consider in my own teaching. I now have a far greater understanding of the importance of repeating information and allowing time for new ideas to "bed-in" before moving on. An entry in my reflective diary highlights this:

08/02/17: "Still aware that LH doesn't feel as natural as RH. Thinking about my own teaching and how obvious it is if one of the students' hands is doing something slightly different when you are a detached observer. Much harder to tell exactly what is going on when you are playing and assessing at the same time. Would be really helpful to have someone standing there saying 'Yes, that's even. Remember what that feels like!' Must remember this when I teach and not just diagnose but actively support good practice in lessons. It takes time to absorb the reassurance that you are doing it correctly, and then to remember what it feels like and recreate it in performance. Going to give all my students a bit longer 'doing it right' in lessons before I move on."

Where previously I would have changed topic in a lesson once I was confident my student had got the hang of a new concept, I now spend a little more time reinforcing and reassuring. I am also even more aware of the need to 'read' each student and personalize

lesson pace. For example, when to turn up the gas under a new technique or idea and when to let it simmer for a while longer without dampening enthusiasm.

04/21/18: "Thinking during Junior RNCM teaching today about how to combine teaching technique and music successfully. Need technique to get right musical shapes and make sounds in head come out of drum but mustn't be the end of the line. My practice is very technical at the moment, after many years of music only without the technical support, but how to combine this without putting students off is a challenge. Do you only introduce it when the time is right for them or is it really bad practice to let some areas of technique simmer on the back burner while you cover reading/musical shape/phrasing/repertoire, etc.? I don't think I would have been ready for what I'm doing now when I was at college and certainly not precollege. Is it an individual student thing?"

I have much greater empathy for my students as they try new ideas in lessons now. I know exactly how it feels when you want the ground to swallow you up because your hands don't do what your brain is telling them, and you know what you are supposed to be doing but it just isn't happening. I also have a refreshed perspective on the student-teacher relationship and the importance of providing support and encouragement alongside constructive criticism.

Andrea's personal approach to pedagogy becomes clearer at this stage in her professional development journey. Pedagogy emerges as a caring attitude ("not doing harm . . . duty of care"). These features of pedagogy are highlighted in the work of Van Manen (2015) and Noddings (1984), who consider pedagogy as a fundamentally ethical undertaking. Becoming a student again, as part of a long-term process of technical change, Andrea swapped places with her own students. This developed her sense of empathy. In such ways, as teachers "we see our practice from the other side of the mirror and we become viscerally connected to what our own students are experiencing" (Brookfield, 1995, p. 29). Through undertaking this professional development, Andrea has become even more aware of the importance of personalizing her approach to each student, and of providing reassurance. In supporting her students' development as autonomous learners, attending to their emotional worlds and to the individuality of each one she embodies a learner-centered approach (Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt, 2017). For Andrea, these new insights are worth holding on to.

THEME 5: WITH FRESH EYES COMES THE NEED TO STAY FOCUSED

For the first time in my life, I feel confident and at ease behind a snare drum. I know that I can clearly articulate or voice on the drum what I hear in my head. I now have my own personal sound, rather than just playing accurately with a decent tone. I actively seek out snare drum parts when I have a choice about instrument distribution

in a percussion section and am much quicker to demonstrate in lessons, where previously I would have sung a musical example. Rather unexpectedly, the new techniques and concepts I have learned have had a positive impact on every area of my percussion playing, not just snare drum.

10/03/17: "Describing what I was doing to another pro player, I said it was like being picked up and rotated through 90 degrees and then set back down again in terms of my playing. It has had an effect on every aspect from timps to tuned to snare."

In the introduction to his tutor book Wrist Twisters, *Buster Bailey (1999) says that "muscular tension = technical difficulties = expression roadblocks = more tension = technical difficulties beyond our control = musical gridlock. . . . Unhindered, relaxed snare drum technique is going to give you a greater freedom of musical expression and self-confidence in your playing" (p. 6). I have certainly found this to be the case. My hands are softer, and there is less tension in my strokes that in turn produces a fuller and more open sound whichever instrument I play. It has also led to more evenly balanced hands and an increase in playing confidence.*

12/06/17: "Pleased with power and basic sound of loud rolls in gigs over last 2 days. Still a way to go but so much more confident behind SD [snare drum] in gig. Never thought I would look forward to the snare numbers in a program!"

I am also aware that I need to stay focused. Left to my own devices without regular checkups from Dave, I can settle back into mediocrity. This is a recurring theme in my practice diary:

03/09/18: "LH still not as dexterous as RH. Had to keep reminding myself of basic hand position and soft hands. Vocalizing helps with sound/tone production too. Really interesting how I still need to go right back to basics and first principles to stay on track. On reflection this is always the message from lessons with Dave too. It all comes back to soft hands, relaxed sound, and freedom of movement on the drum, and it is these things I tend to forget when trying new challenges. Must look out for this in my students too."

My brain thinks I am doing the right thing, but I need to compare with the videos of Dave playing and analyze carefully. Rereading my research diary also helps and reminds me of the traps I can fall into. The process of writing this self-study has made me reevaluate my learning to this point and given me fresh eyes and a renewed enthusiasm for doing and sharing what I know. Without the research, I would not have kept the diary and had such a comprehensive record of the process to look back on. I certainly would not have thought about it as much or in such depth. There would have been less incentive to carry on when it got tricky; the research commitment kept me working on

the practical side. This is not a finished process by any means. This account is a reflection on my journey so far and is the first stage of a longer collaborative research project.

In this final theme, we read of Andrea's transformation of her personal sound. This resonates with Cahn (2017), who states that the percussionist's choice of sound always "displays an individual musical voice" (p. 21). The impact of Andrea's lessons went wider than the snare drum. There was a ripple effect outward to other instruments. Although these benefits were unexpected, retrospectively it seemed obvious to Andrea because of the centrality of snare drum in percussion learning (Stone, 2009).

Andrea designed her own professional development intervention (six lessons) that she then extended to 16 lessons over 1 1/2 years. This confirms Borko's (2004) finding regarding the effectiveness of long-term interventions and is supported by Kennedy (2005), who found that self-initiated, bespoke training is more effective than something more generalized. Her proactive approach also reflects Conway's (2008) finding that mid-career teachers often take it upon themselves to find the professional development they need (p. 13) rather than responding to offers from employers. As a result, the autonomy that Andrea experienced has made her aware of the need to implement her learning continually and the potential benefits of undertaking further research.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have investigated the professional development journey of a mid-career percussion teacher; this consisted of a self-initiated series of snare drum lessons, with an accompanying reflective process. In responding to the catalyst—the realization there was a space for development in her expertise—Andrea decided to "trouble" her own practice (Kumashiro, 2001). Through undertaking a collaborative self-study into her experiences, we have identified the outcomes and benefits that emerged. Although a learner by nature, it was hard for Andrea to go back to basics, as the fundamentals of her technique felt alien. However, through continued practice, keeping a diary, and developing an understanding of her development in dialogue with a researcher colleague, she found herself reflecting on her own processes of learning. This prompted reflection on teaching, and in turn revealed and confirmed to Andrea aspects of her subjective educational theory. By engaging with the history of the snare drum through literature, Andrea also gained a deeper understanding of performance practice. A complete overhaul ("full rewire") of her snare drum technique provoked her to think about taking care of students in new ways, including their physical well-being and long-term engagement with music-making. As well as bringing about a new confidence onstage, the project gave her new insights into performing and teaching, insights that she wants to maintain at the forefront of her practice and to develop further. Having compared our findings with recent literature on percussion pedagogy and performance (Dunbar-Hall, 2009; Dylan Smith, 2017; Knight, 2014; Williams, 2017), it is clear that our work makes an original contribution to the field, not only in providing new insights into the meaning

of a self-initiated professional development journey to a mid-career percussion teacher but also doing so as a facilitated self-study.

While self-study is concerned with the "immediate improvement of our practice" (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 818), the way this improvement is framed may change according to the individual teacher-researcher. In this case, Andrea's focus was on improving an area of her own musical understanding and performance, as a prior step to improving her teaching. However, this learning process took time. Therefore, immediate improvement was not the goal, even though she quickly began to notice changes in her teaching. Andrea's aims were rooted in the desire to improve her practical knowledge of snare drum technique, in order to help her students develop theirs. In particular, her concerns were: to respond to what she saw as the good teaching her students had received from Dave Hassell, to allow herself to be changed by her students' needs, to place herself in the role of student in order to help those she teaches, and to document this process for the benefit of herself and others. In these ways, this project responds to LaBoskey's (2004) claim that "the rationale for self-study needs to extend beyond the epistemological into learning theory, beliefs about the nature of teaching, and moral, ethical, and political values regarding the means and ends of education" (p. 818). The level of reflexivity in Andrea's process, along with a commitment to self-improvement and investment in a rigorous process of inquiry, is itself one of the hallmarks of professionalism in teaching. As Shulman (2000) puts it: "Research that renders one's own practice as the problem for investigation is at the heart of what we mean by professing or profession" (p. 11). In offering this self-study as an example for others, we emphasize that it is the facilitated research *alongside* Andrea's existing reflective practice *and* the learning from the snare drum lessons that together constituted the process of professional development.

For Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), "The aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle" (p. 20). This self-study has illuminated Andrea's transformative learning process, which might not otherwise have to come to light. Our work has also challenged Andrea as a practitioner and developing practitioner-researcher and has challenged both authors in undertaking a new form of collaboration. But it also provokes questions about how Andrea applies her newly acquired knowledge in practice, and what learning and insights will emerge from engaging with students in cycles of reflection in the longer term. Therefore, we suggest a follow-up investigation using action research (Cain, 2014) that would include sharing this work with colleagues in the hope that it could lead to opportunities for peer support, develop cultures of reflective practice, and inspire others to undertake collaborative research. We believe the implications of this research lie mainly in the potential for professional transformation that exists within critical collaborative inquiry through self-study. Pairing an instrumental teacher with a music education researcher, as in our study, could lead other music teachers to new understandings about their artistic and pedagogical practice that might not have come about otherwise. We also encourage other mid-career instrumental teachers to work

with their employers to design their own professional development opportunities. By the same token, we encourage leaders in music education to dialogue with their employees about their training needs; after all, the responsibility for continuing professional development lies with both parties. To consider framing reflective practice as a collaborative research inquiry can expand teachers' awareness of their development and deepen their understanding of the learning undertaken, as in the example shared in this article. We offer our approach to self-study as a starting point for those who want to undertake similar investigations into their practice.

AUTHORS' NOTE

Thank you to colleagues who read and commented on an earlier version of this article: Bethan Habron-James, Dave Hassell, Liesl van der Merwe.

NOTES

1. See http://www.davehassell.co.uk.

2. The traditional rudimental style of playing uses a series of short sticking patterns (rudiments) originating in military drumming. They are often used in combination to form more complex and extended pieces.

3. Liz Gilliver gave her permission to be named here (L. Gilliver, personal communication, December 29, 2020).

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