



# A Narrative Study of Professional Growth of Outstanding Elementary School Music Teachers

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## **ABSTRACT**

Outstanding elementary school music teachers are outstanding representatives of the elementary school music teacher community, and they are the objects of study and emulation for general elementary school music teachers. Their professional growth experiences can provide inspiration for teacher education institutions to train elementary school music teachers and for general elementary school music teachers to grow professionally on their own. The narrative study of the outstanding elementary school music teachers revealed that the factors affecting their professional growth were from four aspects: personal, family, school and society, and the basic ways of their professional growth were professional learning, teaching and research activities and reflective summaries. It is pointed out that social opinion and encouragement are the key prerequisites for the professional growth of elementary school music teachers, government support and guidance are the important conditions for the professional growth of elementary school music teachers, and school service and management are the basic guarantees for the professional growth of elementary school music teachers, and independent learning and reflection are the inexhaustible motivation for the professional growth of elementary school music teachers.

**Keywords:** professional growth of teachers; excellent music teachers in elementary school; narrative study

### **1. Presentation of the Problem**

With the in-depth development of quality education and the increasing awareness of quality education, the important position of music education in quality education is becoming more and more prominent, and the educational, aesthetic and cognitive functions of music are receiving more and more attention. From the functions of music, it is not difficult to deduce that music education in schools can not only promote a deeper understanding of music knowledge but also encourage students to cultivate their emotions while studying. Teachers are the first resource and the key subject of education and are therefore undoubtedly a central factor in determining the quality of education, and it is clear that in order to improve the quality of education, teachers must first improve their professionalism and competence. Similarly, the improvement of the quality of music education is closely related to the improvement of the professional growth level of music teachers. In terms of the relationship between education and human development, education plays a very important role in the development of human beings throughout their lives, and education should start with children. In this day and age, with the rapid development of information technology, the equipment and facilities for education have improved significantly, and the use of information technology in the field of education is becoming more and more common. Primary school is the first stage of compulsory formal education and is an important initiation stage for the first understanding of life and the formation of life, world and values. The role of music education in the development of the individual is such that exposure to music, the experience of music and the understanding of music from an early age is essential to the healthy growth and development of the individual, and it is, therefore, essential that music education programmes are offered at primary level and that music education for primary school students is strengthened. As the first resource and the key subject in the implementation of music education in primary schools, the level of professional growth of primary school music teachers directly determines the quality of music education. The experiences of outstanding primary school

music teachers, who are the outstanding representatives of the primary school music teacher community, are the objects of study and emulation for ordinary primary school music teachers, and their professional growth can provide inspiration for teacher education institutions to train and train primary school music teachers and for ordinary primary school music teachers to grow professionally on their own. It is clear that exploring the professional growth experiences of outstanding primary school music teachers, analysing the characteristics of their professional growth stages and the internal and external factors affecting their professional growth, as well as the main ways to promote the professional growth of primary school music teachers, can provide a reference for the professional growth of primary school music teachers in general, as well as for teacher training institutions in general when training primary school music teachers. This is the genesis of this paper.

## **2. Research Process**

### **2.1 Research Methodology**

This study mainly uses the narrative research method. Narrative research is a narrative-based research method, which is contextual, story-based and subjective in nature. This research method is able to discover the essence, laws and value of education by describing and analysing real school life, educational teaching events and educational practice experiences, so as to uncover the educational ideas, theories and concepts behind a series of lives, and experiences, events and behaviours. The research methodology of this study includes The specific research methods of this study are:

1. On-site observation. This study was carried out through in-depth field observations at the work sites of the research subjects and their work processes were recorded faithfully.
2. In-depth interviews. The interviews with teachers in this study were in-depth interviews based on a pre-developed semi-structured interview outline.

In addition, interviews were conducted with some of the students who were the subject of the study, both to gather richer data for the study and to further test the reliability of the data collected during the interviews with the teachers, which were conducted specifically with the students who were the subject of the study.

### **2.2 Research Subjects**

In this paper, three outstanding music teachers were selected from three different primary schools in Jingzhou city as the subjects of the study. The commonalities among these three outstanding music teachers are: firstly, they all hold senior titles; secondly, they have won first or second prizes in provincial and municipal teaching competitions; and thirdly, they are all good at conducting research on primary school music teaching.

## **3. Research Results**

### **3.1 Stages of Professional Growth of Outstanding Music Teachers in Elementary School**

The professional growth of teachers is a long process, in which the three teachers continue to break through obstacles, break through themselves and transcend themselves. In solving these problems, the three teachers continue to progress and improve their own teaching ability, which better promotes the professional growth of individual teachers. Therefore, the professional growth of primary school music teachers is a long-term, dynamic and ever-changing process, which runs throughout the careers of the three teachers from this point onward. It is, therefore, necessary to make

certain divisions, studies and analyses of the three teachers' professional growth stages, to be able to more systematically and comprehensively analyse and discover the general rules and characteristics of primary school music teachers' professional growth, so as to provide a reliable basis for reference and guidance for their professional growth. The speed and extent of teachers' professional growth can be influenced by their own internal factors and the overall social environment, and each stage of a primary school music teacher's career has different needs and development. From the professional growth experiences of the three teachers, it can be seen that they all went through the general developmental stages of teacher growth, and the author uses the three teachers as examples to analyse the laws of professional growth of outstanding primary school music teachers. In this study, the theory of Fessler, a representative of the 'professional life cycle', is combined with the actual situation of the three teachers, and their professional growth is divided into three stages.

### ***1. Dream-making period--pre-vocational preparation***

Interviews with the teachers revealed that the three teachers had undertaken a series of preparations prior to entering their careers in order to achieve their ambitions. Pre-employment preparation refers to the preparation of all those who are not working in the profession for their formal entry into the workforce, and the three teachers did the following before entering their careers.

#### ***(1) Study a relevant subject at a teacher training college***

Teacher training schools are the best universities for training teachers of all subjects with an educational nature. During their studies in teacher training, teacher trainees acquire a more comprehensive grasp of the education curriculum, the school arranges internships and activities in education, and three teachers accumulate a degree of practical teaching skills.

#### ***(2) Pre-entry awareness of educational perspectives***

In the pre-service teacher education phase, teacher trainees receive systematic study, but their social identity remains that of students. Although schools arrange practical teaching activities such as internships and training, they do not really enable teacher trainees to feel the richness of the role of a teacher. At this moment their view of education is still a relatively abstract concept. No personal distinctive view of education has been developed.

### ***2. Initial term - novice stage***

After completing their studies at the teacher training college, the three teachers entered their professional careers, at which stage they completed their social transformation from teacher training school graduates to novice teachers. At this stage, the three teachers gained a deeper understanding of the teaching profession, combining their theoretical knowledge with their teaching practice, and slowly began to draw on their own teaching experience.

#### ***(1) Development expectations at the beginning of the career***

In the first few years of their careers, they tried to apply the theoretical knowledge they had learnt in school to the classroom, but they always encountered unexpected situations in their teaching practice, and there was a period of discomfort when they changed from being students to teachers. At this time the three teachers slowly explored the process of teaching practice, adapting well to the situations and resolving the dilemmas they faced. This is a crucial stage in the professional development of the teachers, during which their professional abilities and teaching standards improve significantly. It marks a step from novice to mature.

#### ***(2) The gradual formation of a view of education***

At this stage, novice teachers, find many problems in education, but they are not yet able to move to

the theoretical level due to their lack of ability and experience, but with some experience they have been able to combine theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experience in different forms, and have come up with educational methods that fit the actual situation, and their personal view of education has begun to take shape.

### **3. *Developmental period - beyond the self***

Primary music teachers at this stage do not feel the difficulty and trouble for the general teaching practice and they start to experiment with innovative teaching models to make their classes more lively and interesting. The three teachers have further demands on their teaching standards.

#### **(1) *Maturity of educational outlook***

By this stage, the three teachers had easily completed the required teaching tasks and were able to control the classroom well. The three teachers are beginning to work towards the goal of an innovative classroom and the concept of lifelong learning has taken hold of the teachers' hearts.

#### **(2) *Reflecting on Innovation***

At this stage, the three teachers have a wealth of practical experience in teaching and use themselves as objects of reflection, constantly looking for ways to improve their teaching philosophy and methods. They are constantly learning and improving their professional skills in order to achieve a higher level of teaching and to make their students more rewarded in the music classroom. They actively carry out textbook activities after class to learn from each other's teaching experiences of other music teachers, so as to continuously improve their own teaching and go beyond themselves.

## **3.2 The Main Factors Affecting the Professional Growth of Excellent Music Teachers in Elementary School**

### **1. *Intrinsic factors***

(1) First of all, they should be loving and moral, treat students gently and patiently, and educate students with love.

(2) Good physical fitness is necessary for the development of teachers' own professional growth, and more attention must be paid to rest in order to carry out better teaching activities.

(3) Participated in various professional training often with updating their own teaching system, seeking continuous improvement of professional competence.

### **2. *External factors***

#### **(1) Family factors**

The three teachers' families are very supportive of them, and they think it is a good job. With the encouragement from their own families, the three teachers will be more smooth in their professional growth.

#### **(2) School factor**

With the support of their schools, the three teachers were able to develop more comprehensively and to have different channels to improve their professional abilities.

#### **(2) Social factors**

The national government should increase the recognition of music teachers' social status and also improve teachers' salaries to some extent.

## **3.3 The Basic Ways of Professional Growth of Excellent Music Teachers in Elementary School**

### **3.3.1 Professional Learning is the Solid Cornerstone of the Professional Growth of Elementary**

## **School Music Teachers**

In the current learning-oriented social environment, primary school music teachers must undergo professional and systematic training if they want to achieve professional growth. With a foundation of theoretical knowledge, and in accordance with the requirements of the new curriculum reform, primary school music teachers are expected to pay attention to constantly improving their professionalism in music through various means. In today's learning society, primary school music teachers are expected to be practitioners of lifelong learning, to be learners and to be aware of the latest research findings in education and teaching. Through their studies at professional teacher training colleges, they can acquire the professional skills and basic musical knowledge necessary for their professional growth, and through post-service training and independent training, they can further enhance their professional growth.

Teaching and research activities are an important way to enhance the professional competence of primary school music teachers.

The professional growth of three outstanding primary school music teachers cannot be achieved without the necessary teaching and research activities. When primary school music teachers carry out group teaching and research activities, they communicate, share and promote each other's strengths and weaknesses so as to promote their own professional growth. Teaching and research activities allow teachers to express their opinions and allow them to learn and draw on the experiences of others in their interactions with each other [1]. Teaching and research play an extremely important role in improving the quality of teaching. Music teaching and research groups, as an important organisation at the grassroots level of schools, play the function of "teaching" and "research", and when carried out well, they can strongly promote teaching reform, improve the effectiveness of teaching and promote the professional growth of teachers [2].

### **3.3.3 Reflective Summaries are An Effective Way for Primary School Music Teachers to Grow Professionally**

Teaching reflection is an important part of a teacher's teaching process. Active teaching reflection can not only improve the teaching mode, but also promote the teacher's own professional growth. To a certain extent, the professional growth of teachers cannot be achieved without regular reflection and summarization. The study found that all three teachers had learned to reflect and summarise during their maturity. Through reflection and summarising, the three teachers have transcended themselves and made a new leap in their professional growth. Teaching reflection enables teachers to have a professional sensitivity to new educational concepts and new music curricula, to be good at pouncing on new information and developments, and to apply a new world view, outlook on life, education, aesthetics and a positive way of thinking to improve and adjust their mindset and to try and adapt as quickly as possible to the new changes brought about by the curriculum reform [3]. It is inevitable that you will encounter various difficulties in the teaching process so that your work does not proceed

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[1] Jin Linping. Creative teaching and research, wisdom "renewal" - some thoughts on the new paradigm of music school-based teaching and research[J]. *China Music Education*, 2012(08):17-19.

[2] Luo Feng. Creating a teaching and research platform and a charming stage with heart - Reflections triggered by a music teaching and research group activity[J]. *China Music Education*, 2012(01):37-39.

[3] Wan Yu. The new requirements for music teachers' professionalism and business ability in the new curriculum [J]. DOI:10.13980/j.cnki.xdjyxx.gjyj.2010.10.048.

smoothly. For this reason, the development of reflective teachers has become one of the important tasks of contemporary education and teaching [4].

#### **4. Research Recommendations**

##### **4.1 Social Opinion Support and Encouragement are the Key Prerequisites for the Professional Growth of Elementary School Music Teachers**

###### **4.1.1 To Enhance the Professional Status of Elementary School Music Teachers.**

It is indisputable that primary music education is not yet taken seriously by society, and the general environment of social opinion is still not very favourable to the professional growth of primary school music teachers. For example, at this stage, many students and parents still regard primary school music as a recreational course or a secondary subject, and many primary school students do not study seriously in music classes. In fact, primary school music education is also an important part of quality education, and the professional status of primary school music teachers should not be overlooked. Society should promote the public's deep understanding of the important value of primary school music education and the professional status of primary school music teachers through certain public opinion guidance, so as to promote the professional growth of primary school music teachers.

###### **4.1.2 Give Elementary School Music Teachers the Necessary Expectations.**

In this day and age, society has become increasingly vocal about the quality of education and the need for students to develop holistically. Primary school music education is not only an important part of quality education but also a key means of implementing the all-around development of students. As the direct implementer of primary school music education, primary school music teachers are rightly expected to take up the necessary responsibility for music education. It goes without saying that in order for primary music teachers to carry the necessary burden, society should give primary music teachers the necessary expectations. Expectations are both an encouragement and an incentive, as well as pressure and motivation. It goes without saying that the expectations given to primary music teachers by society can inevitably be translated into pressure and motivation for the professional growth of primary music teachers.

##### **4.2 Government Support and Guidance are Important Conditions for the Professional Growth of Elementary School Music Teachers**

###### **4.2.1 Improve the Economic Income of Elementary School Music Teachers.**

Financial income is an important constraint on teachers' professional growth, and it is logical that teachers should be guaranteed the necessary financial income if they are to actively pursue professional growth [5]. At this stage, teachers' salaries in China are generally not high, and this is particularly true for primary school music teachers. In this context, although the majority of music colleges and universities produce many music education graduates every year, there is a shortage of people who are really willing to work in primary schools as primary school music teachers. In order to

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<sup>[4]</sup> Huang Jianmei, Lai Xin. On the impact of teaching reflection on teaching by new teachers [J]. Teaching and Management, 2016(07):12-15.

<sup>[5]</sup> Xu Hong. Laws of growth and cultivation mechanism of expert teachers [M]. Beijing: Science Press, 2019: 116.



change this situation, the government should appropriately increase the salaries of primary school music teachers, so that more music education graduates will be willing to engage in the profession of primary school music teachers, and thus more primary school music teachers will grow up to be excellent primary school music teachers.

#### **4.2.2 Give Elementary School Music Teachers the Necessary Professional Guidance.**

The professional growth of primary school music teachers is an integrated process of pre-service, in-service and post-service. In order to promote the post-service professional growth of primary school music teachers, the government should provide the necessary guidance to the professional growth of primary school music teachers through the provision of various forms of training at all levels, such as 'national training' and 'provincial training'. The government should provide the necessary guidance for the professional growth of primary school music teachers through the provision of various forms of training such as 'national' and 'provincial' training. Professional guidance is crucial to a teacher's career, and professional training for primary school music teachers can facilitate the growth of their professional skills. This can effectively ensure that the classroom is an effective input to the students as well as ensure standardised and complete teaching.

### **4.3 School Services and Management are The Basic Guarantee for the Professional Growth of Elementary Music Teachers**

#### **4.3.1 Give Elementary School Music Teachers the Necessary Humanistic Care.**

Schools are not only the main place where primary school music teachers work, but they are also an important place for their professional growth. By giving primary school music teachers the necessary care, expectations and encouragement, schools can also effectively promote the professional growth of primary school music teachers. Schools, as the workplace of primary school music teachers, should provide a platform where they can fully realise their self-worth so that they can be inspired to love their profession and put their heart and soul into their work.

#### **4.3.2 To Provide Primary School Music Teachers with the Necessary Office Conditions and Teaching Aids.**

At present, the Government's overall investment in primary education is still insufficient, and the office conditions of primary school teachers are still very limited on the whole. Needless to say, as primary school music teachers, who have always been regarded as secondary school teachers, their office conditions are even more rudimentary. It is difficult for a clever woman to cook without rice. The professional growth of teachers cannot be achieved without good office conditions [6]. As a school, in order to promote the professional growth of primary school music teachers, it is reasonable to try to improve the office conditions of primary school music teachers. Primary schools are an important part of compulsory education, but many primary schools do not pay enough attention to music lessons, and many of the teaching aids required in primary school music textbooks are missing in many schools, which to some extent reduces the effectiveness of primary school music classes and prevents primary school music teachers from giving full play to their teaching skills. Only by providing primary school music teachers with the necessary teaching aids can students have an

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<sup>[6]</sup> Xu Hong. Laws of growth and cultivation mechanism of expert teachers [M]. Beijing: Science Press, 2019: 117.



'immersive' classroom and achieve a good classroom effect.

#### **4.4 Independent Learning and Reflection are the Inexhaustible Motivation for the Professional Growth of Primary School Music Teachers**

##### **4.4.1 Improve Your Own Education and Teaching.**

Today's society is a society of lifelong learning, and teachers are the demonstrators and leaders of lifelong learning. As primary school music teachers who are engaged in the specialised profession of teaching, they should uphold the concept of lifelong learning, and only by constantly improving their teaching can they move up the career ladder? Young teachers should not only improve their education and teaching in the practice of teaching positions in schools, but also actively participate in various business training to improve themselves, such as professional ethics training for new teachers, information technology training, classroom teaching management training, as well as training in writing teaching papers, training in designing teaching and research projects, training in teaching materials, training in the basic principles and methods of curriculum reform, training in basic teacher skills, and so on, and in learning and training to continuously absorb, reflect on and improve teaching ideas and methods, broaden their horizons [7] and integrate them into their own education and teaching.

##### **4.4.2 Proactively Reflect on the Effectiveness of Their Own Teaching.**

Educational reflection is a necessary path for the professional growth of primary school music teachers. Educational reflection is the teacher's own music teaching activities and classroom situations as the object of study, the teaching behaviour and teaching process for conscious analysis and summary, recognize and find their own teaching deficiencies, timely accumulation of experience, adhere to the study of business, and constantly improve the quality of teaching [8]. Primary school music teachers should constantly reflect on their education and teaching, strive to work beyond themselves and strive to make further leaps in their level of professional growth. Active reflection is a very important part of teaching. It is not only a process of optimising the teacher's own body of knowledge, but it can also help to develop a teaching style that is unique to them.

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<sup>[7]</sup> Zhou Fang. Using classroom teaching and research as a way to enhance young music teachers' professional competence [J]. *China Music Education*,2018(5):43-46.

<sup>[8]</sup> Shu Jing. Reflections on the professional development of primary school music teachers [J]. *Curriculum. Teaching materials. Teaching method*,2014,34(12):99-102.

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