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Bridging gaps in music teacher education

Actioning the findings of the National Review of School Music Education

Introduction

In response to the National Review of School Music Education, a team of academics from across Australia devised a project aimed at bridging the gaps between research, teaching and academic development through institutions engaged in music teacher education. With funding from the Carrick Institute and using problem-based learning as the tool, pre-service teachers were invited to participate in practical teaching environments through case studies uploaded to a central website. As an adjunct aim, it was anticipated that the project would decrease academic isolation between academics, teachers and pre-service teachers.

Getting Started

Music teachers at all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary, studio, ensemble directors etc) recognise the solitude in which they frequently work. The establishment of links with like-minded colleagues was central to the entire project design. The team resolved to meet face to face in the first instance. In these first meetings, the following outcomes were proposed:

1. Initial development of each phase of the project to provide *contextualised teacher education*;
2. Initial development of *integrated teacher education curriculum models*;
3. Peer collaboration for the *academic development of teacher educators* amongst the project team; and development of a plan to document the aspects of peer collaboration occurring during the project.

The issue of *isolation* was also raised and collaboration offered as a model for addressing isolation in music teacher education. In follow-up meetings, an attempt was made to document the manner in which collaboration occurred. This has not typically been a feature of music education in the past and was seen as crucial to the success of the project in relation to the interaction of both academics and students.

In addition to the project team and pre-service teachers, two other groups connected with music education were invited and have made a significant contribution to the project, namely the implementers group and the reference

group. It is intended that the implementers in each of the partner universities are supported by the project team and a group of national and international music educators including: Dr Jan Packer (University of Queensland), Dr Jackie Wiggins (Oakland University) Dr Kathryn Marsh (University of Sydney) Professor Graham Welch (University of London), Professor Gary McPherson (University of Illinois), Assoc. Professor David Forrest (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) Assoc. Professor Sam Leong (Hong Kong Institute of Education), Dr Neryl Jeanneret (University of Melbourne) Dr Steve Dillon (Queensland University of Technology) Dr Elizabeth MacKinlay (University of Queensland), Professor Huib Schippers (Griffith University) and James Cuskelly (University of Queensland)

Establishing the website:

A website has been launched under the web address www.musicteachersoz.org. It has been designed using 'rooms' with the following structure:

The Project Room: This room incorporates information about the project team, the time line for the project, publications that may arise from the project, literature informing the project and links to suitable resources for music education.

The Public Room: In this room the general public can read current music education news and discuss music education in the online discussion forum.

The Context Room: In this room in-service teachers' experiences are filmed for pre-service teachers to view. Currently this room features four teachers who can be seen responding to questions about their teaching context, their philosophy of teaching and a 'problem' that they would like pre-service teachers to 'solve' for them. During semester one of 2007, there will be 12 case studies for pre-service teachers to investigate. These may change throughout the project.

The Student Room. This is where pre-service student teachers can collaborate, problem-solve, reflect and dream of current and future contexts within a supportive online community. Students have access to a reflective journal, dreaming room, project wiki, discussion boards and an online chat room. There is also

a list of online music education resources that pre-service teachers may find useful

The Research Room: In this room, academics can meet online to discuss, suggest and reflect on this project. By allowing academics to voice their opinions in one location, without geographic or time constraints, we are hoping to collaboratively develop effective teaching models that can be used to improve the learning experiences of pre-service teachers of music.

Case Studies and Initial Trials

Students enrolled in the Master of Education at Griffith University have been involved in the project since January 2007. These students have been very active on the website, and have provided valuable feedback, which has assisted the ongoing design of the website. Dr Scott Harrison (implementer at Griffith University) and Dr Bill Backer (implementer at the University of Tasmania) will begin incorporating the project into their undergraduate teaching during semester one. In semester two, Dr Christopher Klopper (implementer at Charles Sturt University), and Drs Julie Ballantyne and David Cleaver (implementers at the University of Southern Queensland) will incorporate the project into generalist teacher education courses.

Currently, four case studies have been filmed to allow pre-service teachers to engage with real world problems. These case studies are located in preschools, music classrooms and a skate park. In the coming months, filming will also occur with teachers placed in isolated communities, indigenous communities and communities with dissimilar levels of socio-economic demography. All these contexts are designed to allow pre-service teachers to experience a diverse range of problems associated with implementing music education.

The website allows implementers and the reference group to discuss any part of the project at any time in the online chat room or discussion board. This is especially important considering the geographical locations of different members of both the research and implementers group. Positive feedback has been given about the productive collaboration occurring between academics from different institutions.

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Progress on proposed outcomes

1. **Integrated teacher education** will involve students in curriculum that is interconnected, interrelated and interdependent. This has been achieved in two ways. First, a strategy for problem-based learning and assessment has been developed. This strategy incorporates the use of case-studies across multiple sites, where teachers identify issues relating to music education. These issues need to be addressed as part of the assessment at the various institutions. Second, explicit links between theory and practice (within courses) and between general education and music education (across courses) will be emphasised to minimise the ‘fragmented’ nature of teacher education. This will predominantly be facilitated through the online reflections amongst music education students at the various sites.

2. **Contextualised teacher education** provides pre-service teachers with the means to apply knowledge and skills learnt in all subjects to their future context as music teachers by presenting both music and education theory in terms of their application to *music teaching*. This has been developed via two methods. First, the case studies have been designed to encourage students to relate the knowledge presented in all their music discipline and education units to their future professional practice (between schools, the community, and universities). Second, the students will be asked (as part of their involvement) to draw links between general education ‘theory’ and the music classroom. A comparison between traditional school practicum arrangements will assist students to reflect general educational ‘theory’ and its application in the music classroom.

3. **Academic development of teacher educators** including peer collaboration is an important aspect of academic development. In the case of music teacher educators, it seems that discipline-specific peer collaboration is important in minimising the professional isolation of music education academics.

Academic collaboration is already evident throughout this project to promote increased effectiveness of teaching in higher education. This enables both experienced and early-career academics to consolidate the links between research and practice, as well as amongst universities. Regular meetings, online discussions and teleconferences have occurred and the collaborative approach taken will be extended to the workshops that have been built into the project structure. These will aid the continuation of collaboration amongst music academics, and also amongst academics of various backgrounds who might be interested in improving their teaching and learning. This collaboration has begun to be structured and formalised through the use of the website that will continue beyond the timeline of this project, and which therefore has the potential to benefit music students and academics in the future.

Response to the project

Initial online discussions between the researchers and reference group suggest a high level of support for the project. Collaboration is starting to occur between experienced academics on the reference group and the project team. Comments from reference group include:

Great to talk to you today and to surf the site... it's looking really impressive.

It's great. I really love this initiative...I'm addicted already.

The website is looking good - congratulations! I particularly liked the context room, and the hints in this discussion area for reading, writing and asking questions are very helpful. Looking forward to meeting you all on-line

I think the project websites present a very attractive forum for exchange and discussion.

The intended end-user beneficiaries of the project are beginning to interrelate: pre-service teachers interacting through the site have started to realise the importance of engaging students in negotiated curriculum and linking students' prior knowledge with new knowledge. An increased awareness of the significance of context is clearly evident in students' remarks to date. It is expected that the teachers who created the case studies, academics (project team, reference group and implementers) and pre-service teachers will continue to engage in online reflections about the project.

Future directions for the project

Over the coming months, students and academics at Griffith University, Charles Sturt University, University of Southern Queensland and University of Tasmania will continue to implement the project. This will incorporate the involvement of several hundred students. From 2008, it is anticipated that several other institutions who have expressed interest will incorporate aspects of the project into their course. Given the recent findings from the National Music Workshop, there is the potential for www.musicteachersoz.org to become the template for the National Music Education Portal. International interest, brought about through the members of the reference group, has already resulted in the potential development of similar projects in the United Kingdom, Asia, South Africa and the United States.

Academic presentations and publications are currently being prepared for presentation to a variety of national and international forums including Australian Society for Music Education, National Council of Tertiary Music Schools and Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Further information

For more information, please visit www.musicteachersoz.org or contact the project administrator Suzanne Garvis at musicteachersoz@usq.edu.au

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