

## **Lifelong Learning in Music Education: A Brief Examination**

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# LIFELONG LEARNING IN MUSIC EDUCATION: A BRIEF EXAMINATION

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## **Abstract**

*Music education has, for many years, championed methods that reinforce traditional modes of transmission, namely individual tuition, ensemble experiences and classroom teaching. This paper re-examines the notion of lifelong learning in music education. In so doing, it examines formal and informal modes of transmission in music education with specific examples from conservatoriums, education faculties and private providers. It takes account opportunities available for music teaching and learning in preschool, school-age education, tertiary, professional development and other forms of continuous education. Examples of best practice are included, along with suggestions for improvements in the way in which music education is approached.*

*In detailed terms, the paper traces options for music education from birth into later life describing new ways of addressing the notion of flexible learning. Furthermore, means of engaging the disengaged are pursued, particularly with a view to finding equitable ways of involving marginal members of the community.*

## **Introduction**

Music education takes place across the lifespan. The structure of this paper is to briefly review the process of music education chronologically, pinpointing issues associated with each stage (pre-compulsory, compulsory and post-compulsory) and applying material from pertinent literature. In the second part of the paper, these issues are addressed, again with reference to the literature and best practice, with a view to finding solutions and making the post-compulsory years more relevant and valuable.

## **Lifelong Learning in Music Education - the Status Quo**

Our lifelong music education journey begins in womb. The music choices and tastes of our parents are thrust upon us soon after conception and then, from our first utterance, playtime cries and banging of toys, we are engaged in music making. Through lullabies, through the mobiles hanging over our cots, through toys given by well-meaning relatives, our process of music education in the pre-compulsory years begin.

In terms of formal transmission, for many the process begins as early as two or three. At Griffith University's Young Conservatorium, young people begin the process at six weeks of age. By the age of four formal training in pitch, beat, literary and appreciation is taking place.

At school age, the trend moves towards two polarities. For some it is the beginning or continuation of specialized individual tuition, for others, the introduction of larger class or ensemble-based work. Students either specialize or work in groups of around 25 for

their tuition. In Queensland, by the age of eight or nine, opportunities for small group instrumental tuition are reintroduced with “multi” teachers: instructors who are trained to teach a variety of instruments in orchestral groups. Students also participate in ensembles at school from this time. There are enormous musical and social benefits in such a system, providing musical and social skills and promoting the school at which they are enrolled. This is not an uncommon benefit in historical terms: choral societies and brass bands in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were doing exactly the same for small English communities (Machlis, 2003).

At the transition from primary school to secondary school, students become disengaged with the learning of music in a formal sense. This interrupts the lifelong learning process – in some cases, permanently and is therefore worthy of further investigation. This phenomenon does not appear to be restricted to the Australian context. Specifically with regard to choosing music as an academic pursuit, Swanwick (1988) found that for much of this middle schooling period, music was rated the lowest in popularity of any subject. Swanwick and Lawson (1999) later reviewed this data, finding that popularity continued to decline with age and that more girls than boys liked music. Ross and Kamba (1997) agreed, finding that, along with physics, music was the least popular school subject in England in the last 25 years. Fullerton and Ainley (2000) reported that music was taken by 5% of the total student population in Australia.

Yet, at precisely the same time in the lifecycle, students are engaging in their own music, developing individual and peer tastes and spending much of their time listening to music. The styles to which students are listening are usually contrary to the music they have some to know in the formal context. This is the crucial time for music educators as Hartwig (2004, p.ii) identified

The number of students electing to study music at the Senior Level in Queensland State High Schools has declined over recent years. Year 8 is the last time that students experience music lessons before being faced with subject choices.

Hartwig (2003, p.93) investigated ways in which teaching of Year 8 music could be improved, finding that it was possible to “capture their interest and develop positive attitudes towards music.”

Our newest Queensland arts syllabus documents fail to recognize this, moving forward with a Hungarian-based system that even the Hungarians don’t follow with the same religious fervour (Wales, 2004). Hartwig and Barton (2003) undertook an examination of course content and syllabus implementation in the compulsory years. This research suggests that there is a disparity between teachers’ local understandings and syllabus expectation. Choice appropriate repertoire was particularly problematic:

The Kodaly language and focus of the syllabus was not appropriate for most secondary school contexts... the repertoire suggested for use in the classroom was seen as inappropriate, in that it was at much too low a level or childish for secondary students (p. 98).

The drop out rate continues to increase throughout high school. Duerksen’s (1972, p.8) data indicated that 55% of those surveyed stated “loss of interest” as their reason for

giving up while Boyle, De Carbo and Jordan (1995, p.98) conducted research into reasons for student dropouts in instrumental music by surveying band directors with the following results:

1. Lack of commitment to work
2. Loss of interest
3. Scheduling conflicts
4. Lack of parental support
5. Competing interest in sports
6. Lack of success on the instrument
7. Lack of musical ability
8. Lack of communication and encouragement from band directors
9. Too little time
10. Cost of instrument

To a much lesser extent, Boyle et al. found that the following reasons were given: lack of time for individual needs, student reactions to teacher, band classes too big, fear of failure, peer pressure, performance pressure, student dislike of band music, lack of recognition and after school jobs. Hartwig's (2003) research supports these findings, with similar reasons cited including lack of parental support, scheduling difficulties and academic standing of the subject. Ways and means of addressing these issues will be discussed later in the paper.

At the post compulsory stage, large numbers of highly skilled musicians vie for a limited number of places in performance degrees. In the post-compulsory stage, music education is also offered through adult beginner programs, community access programs and community ensembles. Furthermore, professional development through award and non-award courses is meeting a steady demand. Griffith University's Creative Connections program provides such opportunities to students of any age. In 2003, one student was 89 years old. Part of the success of such offerings is their capacity to tap into the motivation elements that inspire people to attend.

### **Towards Solutions**

Some insights may be offered in engaging the disengaged by studying the post-compulsory models along with the pre-compulsory and primary school stages of education. Best practice in the secondary school stages, where disengagement reaches its peak (Swanwick, 1988) is worthy of examination. The process through which this can occur is by an examination of course content, transmission, attributes, and training. These will not only assist in engaging the disengaged, but also the ambivalent. Reasons for disengagement also need to be pursued in order to critically inform the discussion.

### ***Examining Course Content***

Hawkes (2001), commenting in relation to sport, suggested that the right amount, the right type, the right teacher and the right skills and attitudes are clearly very important in relation to course content. These comments could equally apply to music.

Choice of repertoire appears to be a key issue revealed in this research. Popular music styles have been mooted as one solution to this situation, if only as an access point.

Student composition has also been pursued as an important way of connecting with students' identity. Higgins (1999, p.21) suggested that the correct choice of music was not just a matter of "getting it right at the technical level." She goes on to suggest that good repertoire does not have to be emotionally serious and philosophical. Choice of material is also discussed further below in relation to teacher attributes.

### ***Transmission***

The forms through which music itself has been transmitted have undergone considerable change in recent years. Music education has not always embraced change to the same extent – it has tended to remain traditional in the mode of delivery – one-to-one tuition is favoured for "serious" instrumental and vocal tuition, small group for pre-school learning, class and ensemble style for the compulsory and post compulsory years. These notions need to be challenged in order to improve retention and engagement. Using a combination of modes of transmission is an important step. An example of this can be found in vocal tuition. It can and has been taught in each of one-to-one, small group (Jansen), choirs and classes, each one offering different perspectives on the vocal learning process. Harrison (2004c) reflected on the contribution of each of these styles to the learning process, commenting that the choral experience offers music literacy and social skills, the class can provide historical and analytical experience, the collegial nature of small group tuition enhances knowledge and support systems, while the individual tuition gives technical and closer personal involvement. In most cases, the integration of these modes does not occur in practice, due to philosophical and financial constraints.

Excellent examples abound in the environments that have embraced technology and other flexible forms of teaching. Several schools in South-East Queensland have taken steps forward in this respect and the numbers of students engaging in music has increased dramatically. In the tertiary sector, some universities have programs that are offered through the "virtual" conservatorium. This model enables students to study off-campus, providing they have access to an approved tutor and ensemble performance opportunities. Contact with the university is maintained via a visiting assessor, communication with an electronic carer along with packaged resources and access to online study materials.

In community programs, the key to engagement is people wanting to attend for their own sake: for enjoyment, socialization, repertoire and musical skills. Private providers, along with schools based in popular styles and those incorporating technology that have little trouble attracting clients. Examples of this in the secondary school setting can be found in diverse geographic and socio-economic environments. Flexibility in delivery has implication for addressing the time constraint many students cite as the reason for discontinuing music study.

### ***Teacher attributes***

There has already been considerable discussion in the literature relating to the role teachers play as early influencers of musicians. Mackenzie (1991), Lamb (1993), Lautzenheiser (1993), Hanley (1998), and Sloboda and Howe (1991) found that warmth and enthusiasm were crucial in fostering a child's love of music making. Yang (2002) commented at some length on this attributes in relation to the critical adolescent phase.

The Declaration of Education (2001) charges teacher educators to produce skilled teachers who take account of change in education; who can understand the needs of a variety of learners, who are more than subject specialists, who are equipped to operate across different age levels and educational settings, who are expert in assessment and who understand the deeply valued dimensions of learning which are not easily measured (Boston, p.10). Teachers have the capacity to create safe learning environments, to ensure equity occurs in practice in their engagement with students and to develop the potential of all the students in their care. While higher education bears some of the responsibility for producing teachers with the characteristics outlined above, as mature and responsible adults, teachers themselves must embrace skills, attitudes and understandings outlined in the Declaration of Education.

Harrison's (2003c, p. 11) research into singing teaching found that the attributes considered most important for teachers to possess included:

1. Respect for the individual, with an emphasis on flexibility
2. Knowledge of the physical aspects of singing
3. Knowledge of appropriate repertoire
4. Aural, keyboard, language and organizational skills
5. The ability to communicate effectively with enthusiasm, encouragement good humour and patience

The author is currently engaged in a research project that pursues these and other attributes in relation to classroom teaching. Preliminary findings suggest that relational attributes, communication skills, respect and content knowledge are highly regarded.

### **Implications for Post-Compulsory Training**

Pre-compulsory, compulsory and post-compulsory education have complementary roles. This paper has particularly endeavoured to find ways in which each sector can inform the processes of other sectors to enhance lifelong learning opportunities in music education.

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