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Perceive Their Practice**

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Looking Forward: An Investigation into how Music Teachers Perceive their Practice

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Within the education context there is an increasing focus in curriculum development and pedagogy for teachers to address the diverse needs of their students in their teaching practices. This paper will explore the concept of inclusivity in the education environment with particular focus on music education. It will present research on how music in various contexts is transmitted and how it is important to recognise these ways of teaching and learning given both the diverse student population in Australian classrooms and the direction of educational policy. Part of this argument will include data that investigated how students in the contemporary music education context prefer to learn. It will then outline further data collected via an interview process with a number of music teachers in regard to the contemporary music education 'space'. It will explore what teachers think about the demands and expectations placed on them in terms of inclusivity and multi-modes of teaching and learning. This discussion will focus on the teachers' own practices with their students and how they approach these concepts within the classroom. It will also endeavour to seek what the teachers' opinions are on the support and knowledge provided for them to address such approaches. The purpose of this paper is to offer ways to *Look Forward* into the future of Australian music education practices.

Introduction

This paper reports on a continuing research project that began in 2003. The project's aims are to both gather evidence from a number of sources in regard to teaching and learning practices in the Australian music education context, and gauge how this information may impact on such an environment. The research more specifically aims to ascertain what the students' experience and preference is to learning, and also investigates the opinion of teachers in regard to the music teaching and learning context. The main impetus surrounding this research is that of inclusion. It has been recognised repeatedly (Eckermann, 1994; Jorgensen, 2003; Rizvi, 1986) that classrooms are consistently constituted of students from diverse backgrounds. This observation has influenced much policy and curriculum development with government bodies espousing the need for educators to address inclusivity with their teaching practice (Destination 2010: Education Queensland).

The Inclusive Learning Unit of Education Queensland (The State of Queensland – Department of Education and the Arts, 2002) for example, outlines that inclusivity refers to learning:

- where all students feel a sense of belonging and respect in their life at school
- where all students can achieve their full potential
- that targets groups of students considered marginalised, for example Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, students from a non-English speaking background or students with a disability.

It highlights that a teacher's practice should consider these aspects for it to be *inclusive*.

These sentiments have also found their way into policy documents with many statements acknowledging the importance of accepting the multicultural makeup of the student cohort in our schools. In Arts policy specifically, the Queensland Arts 1-10 syllabus highlights that:

Arts activities should be adjusted constantly to meet the abilities, needs and interests of individuals and groups of students...students may engage in experiences in different ways or make choices from a range of options so that learning is relevant and meaningful. They will have multiple opportunities to participate in learning activities to demonstrate what they know and can do with what they know. This approach involves both students and teachers in the design of learning and assessment and requires negotiation and flexibility. (The Arts - Years 1-10 Syllabus, p. 10)

Further, in music education discourse, many have noted the importance of recognising the various ways in which music is taught (Campbell, 1991; Dunbar-Hall, 1999 and 2004; Nettle, 1998; Volk, 1998) in order to acknowledge the rich and diverse nature of music itself. The methods and strategies used in communicating music knowledge can be varied and complex and Campbell (1991) discusses various ways of learning music knowledge such as rote learning, demonstration, imitation, memorisation and

repetition (Barton, 2003b). Accordingly, it is argued that educators should draw on this knowledge in the classroom context so as to best address the needs of students who are consistently from diverse social and cultural backgrounds (Smith, 1993; Stowasser, 1994).

But what does this all mean? Have teachers been given enough knowledge on how to do this? Is there really a need for teachers to recognise student difference and implement corresponding methods in the music education 'space'?

Background

These current questions arose as a result of the completion of a number of stages of the above-mentioned research. The first stage of the study involved a questionnaire that sixty students between the age of twelve and seventeen completed. These students were involved in either classroom music or instrumental music programs or both. The findings from this stage of the research were reported on at the Australian Association of Research in Music Education conference in 2003 (Barton, 2003). Generally, the students in the classroom context highlighted that they learnt music mainly through their peers and by ear, whereas in the instrumental music context the students learnt through teacher modelling and by using a set textbook. It is interesting to note that the students in the classroom context felt that they wanted to improve their skills in music reading and writing in the traditional notation form, whereas the students in the instrumental context wanted to increase the experience of aural activities and consequently the level of their aural ability.

In the second stage of the research, students who completed a questionnaire were invited to participate in an individual interview in regard to student preference to learning. Of the sixty students, twelve returned to participate in the interview process. The results from this stage were reported at the Australian Society for Music Education conference in 2005 (Barton, 2005). The findings from stage two of the research provided information on not only the ways students preferred to learn but what methods they actually did use within music learning contexts. The research highlighted that students engage in a range of activities which were categorised as doing – textorial and textural - and reflecting. In regard to preferences to learning, students not surprisingly were more drawn to doing activities, that is kinaesthetic ways of knowing.

Overall, from the first two initial stages of the research it was concluded that a balance between both aural/oral and written modes of learning was desirable. The differences between the classroom and instrumental music contexts could assist in the development of a model of teaching and learning which takes this balance into account. The research has also shown thus far that students are very clear on *what* and *how* they prefer to learn. As a result of stage two's data it also became clear that students commented frequently on the nature of the teacher – whether they liked the teacher personally contributed greatly to the students' learning outcomes (see Harrison, 2004).

Accordingly, it was concluded that teacher responses would provide essential information in regard to the teaching and learning of music in context. Stage three of the research therefore involved the analysis of the information documented in stages one and two, that is making sense of the data. This paper reports on data gathered for stage four of the research via an initial questionnaire and then personal discussion with teachers of music.

Stage 4 – Teacher Responses

Ten teachers from various Brisbane schools participated in this stage of the study. Each of the teachers was interviewed and the responses transcribed. The transcriptions were forwarded to the participants for further clarification and confirmation. This data was then analysed with the view of finding emergent themes throughout the discourse.

The interviews with teachers were structured informally so that conversation could flow and issues relevant to the teachers themselves could be raised. A number of set questions were used however (see appendix 1). The questions covered areas such as context, policy, approach to and/or method of teaching and learning, and professional development.

Results

The results from this stage of the study highlighted overwhelming evidence that teachers consider the individual needs of their students as a major priority in their teaching goals. Data is presented according to areas investigated in the conversations with the teachers. These are:

- context – description of by teachers
- policy
- approach/method – how do you address
- professional development.

Context

Each of the teachers were asked to describe the school in which they worked. Table 1 presents descriptions of the sites as provided by the teacher participants. Of the ten sites six schools were state schools, that is publicly funded and the remaining four were private school (three of these were Catholic). Three schools were primary schools, two were schools that offered both middle and upper secondary school options and the remaining five catered for secondary students only. The schools were selected randomly so as to gain a wide range of experiences and contexts. As such, four of the schools represent those (as described by the teachers) as low-socio economic, another four were described as having a range of social and cultural backgrounds present in the student population and the remaining two representing private schools whose students were on the whole considered to have come from high income families.

The research highlighted that depending on the context of the school environment, teachers were faced with a number of different challenges. For example, the teachers working in low socio-economic schools all commented on the fact that their major challenge in teaching concerned behaviour management problems. For these teachers understanding and developing strategies that assisted in managing these issues was a high priority and contributed to practices that were inclusive. It was consistent in these particular environments that specific departments in the school were established to support students with learning difficulties or disabilities. There was also a staff member of members responsible for the implementation of behaviour management plans and programs of support for these students in the general classroom context including music.

In the other schools that were described as middle to high income teachers felt challenged by the development of curriculum and corresponding programs. The notion of inclusion according to these teachers was about challenging each of their individual students academically. These contexts were described as being “not so multicultural” (Teacher B). The teachers said that the style predominantly taught in these environments was Western Art Music and the majority of the students were learning how to play an orchestral musical instrument.

Further, in schools that had a distinct ‘multicultural’ student cohort, recognising various learning styles and prior knowledge were prominent.

Teacher A for example said:

I try to consider what music experience students have had before they come into my classroom ...I include the music that may form part of their culture and ask them to participate by introducing it to the rest of the class. I really hope that each and every one of my students feels a sense of belonging and know that they all hold valuable knowledge.

Teacher D commented similarly:

When I was at uni they talked about different ways people learn – I think it was based on that Gardner guy’s stuff. I think about that every now and then and try to use more visual aids and balance activities between listening, written and practical work.

Teacher C felt that if every student was engaged and valued, then you do not have too many behaviour management problems. They believed that if you ‘included’ all the students by listening to them and understanding their own approach to learning and goals then they were all achieving something and therefore happy.

It thus appeared that the context of the school influenced the way in which the teachers taught whether consciously or unconsciously.

Policy

In regard to policy, teachers were initially asked to explain what inclusive education and multiliteracies meant to them. A number of consistencies were evident.

Inclusive education is an approach that recognises:

- minority groups
- students with learning difficulties
- individual differences
- the importance community plays
- social, cultural, emotional, religious aspects of children's lives.

Multiliteracies refers to students being able to:

- communicate in a number of ways
- use technology effectively
- learn other 'languages'
- demonstrate fluency in a number of ways – to be literate means to be fluent in whatever it is you are engaged in.

The teachers were then shown a number of statements that feature in Queensland policy documents both music and non-music. Some examples include the following:

The Arts key learning area provides opportunities for all students to access learning in and through the auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, and verbal ways of knowing. (Arts 1-10, p. 11)

Teachers should ensure that the particular needs of the following groups of students are met: female students; male students; Aboriginal students; Torres Strait islander students; students from non-English speaking backgrounds; students with disabilities; students with gifts and talents; geographically isolated students; and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. (Queensland Senior Music Syllabus, p. 34)

Most of the respondents had admitted to reading new policy thoroughly, including the pre-ambles when they are first in possession of them and were therefore familiar with statements such as those above. However, some of the teachers felt as Teacher F did that the policy "does not really influence how I teach or my teaching style but does heavily impact on what I teach. I for example, refer to course specific information that is required when writing my work programs" (Teacher F).

It was consistent in the interviews that the teachers regularly referred to the 'back' sections of relevant syllabi such as the core content present in the Arts 1-10 document (see appendix 2). Teachers A and G agreed that this material did not necessarily address issues such as 'inclusion' and therefore did not stipulate how they should teach but what they should teach. With their 'everyday busyness' most teachers did not get the chance to consolidate any ideas that may have come about from such statements.

Teacher F was embarrassed to admit that they actually had not had the chance to even look at the new policy document but felt that was alright as it does not have to be implemented until next year.

Another teacher was clear that their school placed a large focus on new policy implementation.

Our school has a view to implement any new guiding principles that filter through government policy. The principal here is very good at gauging how to implement these concepts through the curriculum ... We have various sub-committees that address a number of aspects in curriculum development in the school. One of these looks specifically at students who need extra support whether due to learning difficulties, gifted and talented or non-English speaking backgrounds. (Teacher E)

Teacher B said that, as it was not compulsory for them to implement the new Arts 1-10 syllabus, they had only looked through the document briefly and found the core content to be useful but felt that the school would not change their existing programs to match the syllabus totally.

Each teacher had said that they were familiar with these documents but the extent of this familiarity varied from “just seen the book” to “have read from cover to cover.”

Approach/Method to Teaching and Learning

The teachers indicated a number of methods were used in their classrooms such as teacher centred discussion, written work, practical work and use of computers. In each of these approaches to teaching and learning, many of the teachers said that they tended to teach in a way they thought was effective. The notion of *effective* practice varied from one context to another. Some examples are:

- good results from students
- understanding evident
- enjoyment
- enrolment numbers.

In relation to inclusivity teachers offered a number of approaches/methods that they implemented within the classroom and programs:

- use of appropriate resources
- inclusion of units and/or repertoire that address social and cultural issues for example, use of contemporary Australian composers’ works, world music
- learning support for students with needs
- extra-curricular activities
- community engagement.

It became apparent that on the whole teachers agreed that approaches to teaching inclusively centred on the *how* of teaching not on the *what*. Teacher E for example stated:

It would be the strategies that I use that are of more importance if I wanted to be sure each individual student’s needs were being addressed. Adding content to programs that might be culturally or personally significant may help but would not impact as much as the methods I use.

A number of the teachers commented that the outcomes approach to teaching and learning was positive as it allowed teachers to address individual student needs.

Six of the teachers commented that practices implemented within the schools that they thought addressed the notion of inclusion, were those that were offered outside the general classroom practises. These included various extra-curricular activities such as multi-cultural dance groups and events. The teachers felt that these activities were those that provided greater access to the majority of students. Particularly at the senior level was this so, where music classes were small due to the requirement of students to have particular skills to take music as a subject.

Professional Development

Disappointingly, all of the teachers that participated in this stage of the study said that they had not had the opportunity to attend professional development that specifically addressed inclusion. Four teachers, all of whom worked in State education schools, said that they were required to attend a compulsory session on teaching and learning issues particularly pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One teacher felt that although this knowledge was extremely important they felt the session did not provide any worthwhile information on these issues.

It is vitally important that all teachers have some kind of understanding of issues that our indigenous students face. When I went through teachers’ college there were no subjects offered on indigenous culture and I am sure that is the case for many teachers. Nowadays students are lucky enough to have these courses offered but I believe that they are still not compulsory...The training provided by the department really did not teach me anything new. In fact, I know that a number of

staff were resenting having to go at all. The knowledge of most value is what you learn actually dealing with students from these backgrounds. (Teacher H)

Additionally, Teacher A said that as they often had individual students in their classroom who had special needs they regularly met with relevant specialists to discuss suitable programs. However, these were always brief internal meetings and not external professional development sessions offered to staff.

Teacher J also stated that, as they were interested in learning more about being a special needs teacher they had personally and actively sought out information when dealing with students who either had a learning disability or other difficulty. They thought that unless teachers personally had this interest they could teach for twenty years or more and not have any experience or access to professional development in the area.

Conclusion

The results from this research process have provided invaluable insight into the music education realm. The first two stages of this research have focussed on the students – what they learn, how they learn and how they prefer to learn. It highlighted how students of music in both the classroom and studio instrumental music contexts perceived the teaching and learning processes used. In stage three an analysis and consolidation of this data showed that it was desirable to then gain the view of the teacher. Accordingly, stage four has explored the world of the teacher and focused on not only how they approach their teaching practice but also what other outside forces impact on these processes.

Generally, the teachers held the view that there were many pressures placed on them in regard to their own practice. Aside from actually teaching music they felt regularly bombarded with other issues particularly through their administration. Topics such as curriculum development, technology, behaviour management plans, extra-curricular activities, reporting and profiling, keeping up-to-date with Arts specific policy (of which both Junior and Senior levels have had changes in Queensland) and the overall hectic schedule of school life all impacted on how the teachers thought about their practice.

This stage of the research highlighted that teachers themselves felt it beneficial to be given the opportunity to discuss such issues as they seldom get this chance. Some were thankful to have been asked to participate as the process had enabled them to clarify and articulate what they were actually doing and how they could approach their practice and relevant programs in the future.

As stated previously, the aim of this research is to provide valuable information in regard to how both students and teachers perceive what is happening in the music education realm. This knowledge can be used to help assist in understanding the processes and structures that exist between student and teacher and can then *Look Forward* into future practices within the Australian music education context.

About the Author

Dr Georgina Barton is a music educator who values the diversity that music brings into the teaching and learning context. Her area of expertise is inclusive pedagogy and the development of teachers' skills in addressing multi-modes of learning. She has had experience in a diverse range of music cultures. Dr Barton is currently on staff at Griffith University in Music and also works with Education Queensland.

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Table 1

Description of the Sites as Provided by Teacher Participants

Site and Teacher	Date of interview	Enrolment number - approx	Number of Music teachers	Description
A	20 th June	600	1	Low socio-economic, more focused on apprenticeships than academic – a large number of cultures represented (predominantly Polynesian)
B	21 st June	1500	2 ½	Private school catering for year 5-12 students, mainly white Australian families and Asian students (fluent in English) – high income families
C	12 th July	300	1	Small catholic school, range of incomes very multicultural, prep-yr 7
D	12 th July	700	1	Low socio-economic, large indigenous population, years 8-12
E	13 th July	1600	3	Large private catholic boys school, range of backgrounds, parents on the whole interested
F	20 th July	900	2	Large state school with students interested in learning
G	21 st July	1200	3	Large state school with high Polynesian population, years 8-12
H	29 th July	320	1	Small school that has a supportive parent body, years 1-7
I	1 st August	500	1	Low socio-economic with few resources, years 1-7, diverse representation of cultures including Muslim students
J	1 st August	800	2	Students from various backgrounds both culturally and economically

Appendix 1

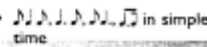
Questions Asked of Teachers

- How would you describe your classes both socially and culturally?
- How do you address the cultural and social differences in your classes?
- How do you define inclusive education? Multiliteracies?
- In regard to a number of statements from policy documents do you think that your teaching practice addresses these sentiments
- If not, why?
- If so, how?
- How you do perceive inclusivity? What are some of the ways your school addresses this?
- Do you think results from students reflect cultural background? Explain further.
- Do you think students would benefit if you had access to more in-service and ideas on how to teach differently – in culturally diverse ways? That is how music is taught in other cultures and its meaning in different contexts?
- Do you feel up-to-date with approaches to teaching and learning?
- Has the school provided in-service generally on these issues
- Have you attended arts specific in-services on inclusivity?

Appendix 2

• THE ARTS •

• YEARS 1–10 SYLLABUS •

Core Content			
Music			
Students sing, play, listen and respond to a wide range of repertoire through which core musical components are learned. The ability to express themselves in music, to think in sound and to read and write music notation empowers students to be musically independent and contributes to personal satisfaction and enjoyment.			
Key components	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
<i>Once introduced, core content is to be revisited and developed in subsequent levels.</i>			
Rhythm and metre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •  in simple time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commonly occurring patterns in simple and compound metre • syncopated rhythms • triplet in simple metre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • augmentation and diminution • mixed metre
Pitch and melody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ia pentatonic scale • perfect 4th and perfect 5th intervals • treble clef notation — F, B_♭, E' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C, G, D, F major and related natural and harmonic minor keys and scales • major, minor and perfect intervals, up to and including octave • treble and bass clef notation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A, B_♭ and E_♭ major and related natural and harmonic minor keys and scales • augmented and diminished intervals
Part work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • melodic canons up to four parts • rhythmic and melodic ostinatos and accompaniments • tonic and dominant accompaniments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chords and progressions using I, IV and V in known major keys, and chords i, iv, v and V in known minor keys • ensembles in up to four parts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chords and progressions using I, ii, IV, V, V7 and vi in known major keys and chords i, iv, v, V in known minor keys • ensembles in up to four parts, one person per part
Form and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first and second time endings, <i>da capo al fine</i>, <i>dol segno</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forms and styles encountered in repertoire • homophonic and polyphonic textures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forms and styles associated with particular historical eras and cultural contexts
Tone colour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • brass instruments • solo instruments and ensembles from a range of cultural and historical contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cross-cultural timbres • electronic and computer-generated timbres • orchestral timbres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • instrumentation and timbres associated with particular historical and cultural contexts
Expressive elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accents and pause • mezzo piano (mp), mezzo forte (mf) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commonly occurring signs and terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • signs and terms encountered in repertoire