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Title of Paper

Musicians as teachers: developing a positive view through collaborative learning partnerships

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Declaration

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Musicians as teachers: developing a positive view through collaborative learning partnerships

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Previous research with classical instrumental musicians has highlighted the intrinsic benefits of teaching in addition to the perhaps more obvious benefits of securing a regular income. Yet, despite the presence of educational activities in the portfolio of most musicians, teaching remains on the periphery of many music performance programs. The hierarchical inference in musicians' self-report of success as a soloist, instrumentalist or teacher is perpetuated in the separation of education and performance students during their university education. This study investigated the effects of providing a positive engagement with teaching through a unit of study delivered to a combined cohort of 2nd year undergraduate music education, composition and performance students. The unit was designed to increase students' understanding of the realities of professional practice, and to form productive and mutually beneficial partnerships: promoting a better appreciation of career development and self-identity during the formative years of study. Students' responses were gauged with the use of surveys implemented at the commencement and conclusion of the unit. Performance and composition majors reported a positive change in their perception of the role of teaching in their careers, and music education majors reflected a growing awareness of the benefits of working in partnership with performers. The study demonstrated that positive teaching experiences within the training of musicians, increases the likelihood that students will plan a positive engagement with teaching.

Background

Perceptions of success are critical to the career development of musicians. Julliard School Principal, Joseph Polisi, called for success to be redefined for Julliard graduates: ‘to see more of them accept that a full-time performing career is “just not very tenable any more”’ (in Freed, 2002, p. 1).

Aspirations of greatness are frequently instilled before students commence university-level training, and often the intensity of commitment is dictated by parents when training commences (Ellis, 1999). Sand (2000) hypothesised that it is often early teachers and families ‘who make these performers feel that they have failed if they do not make it as soloists. The unspoken threat of being a disappointment to these adults has loomed over them from the beginning and can remain a source of trouble throughout their lives’ (p. 139).

The education of musicians has altered very little in that performance students tend to view teaching as ‘a ‘fall-back career’ if they ‘fail’ to make it big in the performing arena’ (Weller, 2004, p. 252). Reflecting on her own transition from the pursuit of a soloist career to that of a piano teacher, Huhtanen (2004) wrote of the disappointment experienced when soloist aspirations are unrealised. She drew upon Freud’s theory of mourning to explain that following a failure, the restoration of self-image and orientation towards reality requires the individual to release the fulfilment obtained previously from that which had been lost. Huhtanen categorised the piano teachers in her research either as *realists* who accepted teaching as an integral part of their musical identities, or as *dreamers* who engaged in teaching to meet financial obligations, and who possessed a traumatic relationship with their playing as a result of not having moved on from their performance dreams.

The characteristics of work as a musician appear not to reflect the career ambitions of those entering the field; therefore it is interesting to consider the factors that influence a musician’s perception of a successful career. Loebel suggested that most music performance students ‘are not made aware of the practical aspects involved in making a living as a classical instrumentalist’ (in

Poklemba, 1995, p. 8). Conversely, Vetter (1990) concluded that students in general were realistic about the lack of performing opportunities and low financial rewards, but that the desire to perform overrode those concerns. Cellist David Pereira concurred: '[m]ost noticeable until very lately has been the assumption that if you do a B.Mus. in cello then the world is going to rush to offer you a playing job. ... Today's freshmen seem to have wised up to this game' (in Dempster, 2003, p. 11).

Music students and graduates give the impression of having a very narrow view of success; most aspire to careers as soloists rather than as orchestral players, teachers or other arts professionals (Arian, 1971; Metier, 2000). Perhaps students would not aspire so quickly to solo careers if they understood what life would be like at the top: according to McDonald (1979), 'a career just as a soloist makes demands that few can meet artistically, temperamentally or financially' (p. 42). Top soloists admit that the stress can be overwhelming: Isaac Stern (1999) described the profession of the solo performer as 'both simple and cruel' (in Stern & Potok, p. 265).

The Higher Education Funding Council for England requested English conservatories to justify their funding by ensuring that 75% of graduates were working principally in performance within five years of graduation. To begin with, it would be almost impossible to accurately measure the average proportion of performance roles over time given the tendency towards multiple job holding (Bennett, 2004; Gregory, 2002; Rogers, 2002). More alarming, however, is the narrow definition of success suggested by such a dictate, which raises many questions about education and training and the destination of graduates. Surely such a narrow definition of success is questionable.

The likelihood of graduates undertaking at least some teaching activity ought to be reflected in conservatorium curricula (Ritterman, in Mark, 1998). A recent study conducted at the Royal College of Music (RCM) (Mills, 2003) found that only 1% of RCM graduates undertook formal teacher training leading to qualified teacher status (QTS) despite the majority of students expecting to include teaching in their careers. One of the strategies engaged for a selection of RCM students was a ten-day teaching associate position in a secondary school, after which students were found to be much more positive about considering teaching as a career option. Participants reported that

prior to the teaching placement they had rarely considered secondary school music teaching to be 'doing music' (Mills, 2005, p. 73), which illustrates the narrow boundaries within which many students perceive musicians' careers, and the hierarchical perception of success.

For many people, as in the case of an accountant, professional identity is the same as job title. For a musician who engages in a portfolio career, the situation is much more complicated; self-definition as a musician could relate to a career as a performer, teacher, sound artist, administrator or researcher. Mills and Smith (2002) found that conservatorium alumni often had a career identity that did not correspond with their income sources. Career identity appears to stem from musicians' aspirations and goals: for example, if, as in Huhtanen's research (2004), a musician is teaching as a means of financial support whilst aspiring to a performance career, the individual is likely to have a subjective career as a performer rather than as a teacher. Conversely, someone who takes on a teaching role as part of a portfolio career and who views teaching as a positive professional activity in which the majority of time will continue to be spent, is likely to have a subjective career identity that concurs with their objective one. Mills and Smith (*ibid*) suggested that musicians become increasingly successful as the gap narrows between their objective work and their aspirations.

The level of motivation and commitment required to achieve and sustain the standard of a classical performer has long been recognised, and much of the research in the area of motivation and achievement of aspirations relates to failure, rather than to success. Kun and Weiner (in Covington, 1983) found that distress experienced by someone who had failed to achieve something increased in line with the amount of effort invested. Maehr (1983) described two different goal situations that have converse effects upon participants. The ego situation is exemplified in competitive activities such as performance competitions in which one's performance is compared to that of others, and which offers the potential for extrinsic rewards: for instance, prizes and money. In contrast, task-goal situations encourage participants to attempt tasks for their intrinsic value, and to determine success based upon the realisation or development of personal goals.

In light of these factors, this study sought to investigate how a positive interaction with teaching might affect self-image. Performance and education majors at The University of Western Australia are located together within the School of Music. A combined cohort ($N=38$) of 2nd year undergraduate education, composition and performance students attended a compulsory introductory teaching unit, which was run over one 12-week semester. The unit was designed to engage students in teaching and learning activities. It incorporated the development of a personal teaching philosophy, and the preparation and delivery to peers of a collaborative teaching artist program in which the students worked together in small groups.

Method

At the commencement of the unit, each student completed a questionnaire relating to career goals including the incorporation of a teaching role. Development of the survey instrument was informed by: 1) the results of previous research relating to identity and career development; 2) graduate destination data which suggested the portfolio nature of musicians' careers; and 3) the researchers' previous experience with teaching artist projects. It was intended that the use of open questions with ample space and encouragement for comment would lead to a rich source of data. At the end of the unit, and following the development of their teaching artist programs, students completed a second questionnaire in which they reflected on their experience within the unit, and reported any changes to their perception of teaching. Analysis incorporated the use of a simple database and colour-coding, which led to the use of quasi-quantification to summarise emerging themes. Questions from each of the surveys have been included as Appendices 1 and 2.

Results and discussion

Commencement survey

The combined 2nd year cohort totalled only 38 and was thus a small sample; however the results of the study aligned with the results of previous research in terms of career awareness and perceptions of success. Results indicate that performance students are aware of the likelihood for them to include teaching in their careers: 97% of respondents were expecting to pursue composite careers, which ranged from teaching and performance to librarianship, arts management and music therapy. Huhtanen's (2004) classification of teachers as dreamers or realists emerged clearly from the performance students, who cited a potential teaching role either because of a desire to teach and the acceptance of a teaching role (realist): 'getting the sense of pride that you are doing something that is making a difference to people's lives' (R12); or to supplement inadequate work in performance (dreamer): 'more reliable income' (R30).

Students were asked to rate how positively they felt about incorporating a teaching role into their careers, using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very positive) through to 7 (very negative). Education students had a mean score of 1.8, and performance students had a mean of 2.1; indicating that they accepted the potential for teaching roles. The composers, however, appeared to be fairly negative about teaching, with a mean score of 5.

Performance students raised concerns that teaching may result in a loss of technical proficiency and an inability to juggle the irregular hours associated with other creative work: 'getting stuck permanently as a teacher' (R32). Given that this was an introductory education unit, it was not surprising that 75% of students were concerned about their lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills. Specifically, participants raised concerns about difficulties with classroom management, and about dealing with a lack of student enthusiasm.

Performance students were more likely than education students to have some studio teaching experience. Overall, 53% of students had some teaching experience and 30% students had already undertaken some group or class tuition work. Surprisingly, only 33% of the education students

stated that they intended to take a classroom teaching position; opting instead for composite careers which included an element of primary or high school teaching.

Development of the teaching artist programs involved students working in groups of three to five to develop a program suitable for delivery to primary school children. Students researched their target school(s) and devised programs including delivery strategies and materials, a budget, evaluation, and curricular links. Each group comprised students from at least two of the three different majors - performance, composition and education.

At an introductory level, the unit addressed learning theories, motivation, developmental and remedial teaching, performance anxiety, time management, and advocacy. Using a student-centred approach, students participated in workshops, seminars, discussions, games, a debate (learning through music versus music for its own sake), and peer-teaching exercises. Students developed teaching artist programs for delivery to primary school children in conjunction with their classroom teachers. Students formed eleven groups of three to five people, and groups comprised a blend of performance, composition and education majors. There was initial reluctance amongst students to work across disciplines: at the first lecture, students sat on tiered seats and it became clear that the performers and composers were on one side of the lecturer theatre; educators on the other. To encourage students to get to know each other, activities throughout the unit involved students working with peers who had the same last initial, hair colour, birth month etc. Whole group activities were conducted in an open space without seating. Particularly successful in terms of integration was a debate in two large teams which were determined by the order in which students arrived. The debate was decided by a vote based upon which group presented the most convincing argument and the quasi-competitive nature of the activity proved to be a productive team-building exercise.

Each teaching artist proposal included a twenty to thirty-minute presentation to peers accompanied by a written proposal. The written proposal consisted of a description of the intended school/s, description of the proposed program, introductory letter, rationale and outcomes.

Programs presented by the eleven groups included a marching band, a percussion program, an opera workshop (resulting in a tragic opera titled *The Consumption of Rapunzel*, in which Rapunzel was eaten by the wicked witch), a rhythm workshop, a fairy tale drama and a composition program.

Figure 1 illustrates three sections of the graphic score for Rapunzel.

Figure 1: Excerpts from the tragic opera 'The consumption of Rapunzel'

Final survey and comparison of results

At the end of the unit, students were again asked to rate how positively they felt about incorporating a teaching role into their careers, using the same 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very positive) to 7 (very negative). Education students retained a mean score of 1.8 and the performance students had a similar mean of 2. Of interest, the composers were much more positive about taking on a teaching role; their mean score had moved from 5 to 2. Students reported that their first experiences with education had raised their awareness of difficult issues facing the profession, and of the potential for those issues to be overcome.

Initially, 53% of performance students had cited inadequate performance work as the dominant reason for adopting a teaching role. In the final survey, every performance and composition student stated that their motivation to teach was a positive engagement with teaching together with, in 75% of cases, a stable income. This more positive view of teaching can be seen through comparison of the responses made in each of the two surveys:

Q14: *For what reason(s) would you take on a teaching role?*

Respondent 14

Survey 1: The reality that I probably won't be able to get a job as a performer so I guess I'll have to teach.

Survey 2: It seems more exciting than before. I definitely think I would like to try it. It seems less like a career that would be boring but a fun and inspiring experience ...
Definitely I am now seriously considering doing teaching after I have finished my performance degree.

Respondent 5

Survey 1: Money to support myself.

Survey 2: This unit has definitely made me enthusiastic about continuing to do education – I was unsure before this unit.

Respondent 11

Survey 1: I'd rather perform – with teaching on the side.

Survey 2: [The experience] inspired me to be interested in teaching and different teaching methods.

Q4 (final survey): *Has your involvement in this unit altered your view of teaching?*

Respondent 8

Survey 1: I am happy to take on a teaching role as long as it is not my primary occupation.

Survey 2: I have always acknowledged that teaching will be part of my career as a musician. I now see it in a much more positive light.

Respondent 13

Survey 1: [I would teach] to support myself as my main income.

Survey 2: My view has changed in seeing teaching as just as important as performance or any other aspect of classical music. It can be a highly enjoyable experience.

Respondent 30

Survey 1: [Teaching is] easier than performing full-time (in my opinion).

Survey 2: I now view it [teaching] as something that is fun-orientated with vast educational benefits.

Thirty percent of students reported that their career goals had changed as a result of their first interaction with teaching. Most comments reflected a positive experience: 'I have realised the exciting potential of education as a profession. It's exciting and *so* [sic] important. I [now] come to inevitable teaching opportunities and positions far more enthusiastically and positively' (R32). One student (R23) indicated in the first survey that he was unsure whether to swap from a major in performance to one in education, and reflected a negative perception of teaching as a first option: 'It [teaching] would be the thing I would do if I was not a performer'. Asked in the final survey whether his view of teaching had changed, he responded: 'At first, teaching was an uninspired thing with only drop-outs doing it. Now I see that it can be made fun for both teacher and student alike'. The student had changed to an education major by the end of the semester. Other students remained unsure, but reported that the experience had made them more informed and positive about teaching. Asked whether the unit had altered career goals, one student responded: 'No, but I am less opposed to the concept' (R21), and another responded: 'No, but if I do end up as a teacher I wouldn't be as daunted as previously' (R13).

Students were asked to comment on the benefits of working as a joint cohort of education, composition and performance students, and 81% of students reported the benefits of encountering different perspectives: '[working together provided] lots of different ideas/views – different talents which open your eyes to things you weren't previously aware of' (R31). 44% of students mentioned the advantages that a diverse skills base brought to their teaching artist projects, and recognised that 'the teaching artist is a valued asset and has a lot to offer' (R1). There were no negative responses to the question.

Concluding comments

Results support Vetter's (1990) suggestion that students are aware of the difficulties associated with securing a performance role upon graduation; however they also suggest that students require guidance to formulate insightful career planning.

The benefits of working with a combined cohort of performance, composition and education students were felt strongly by the students in this study, who reported an increased understanding of the roles of teaching and performance in educational and community settings. Education students reflected a growing awareness of the benefits of working in partnership with performers. Career satisfaction is directly impacted by perceptions of success. Students in this study indicated a positive change in their perception of the role of teaching in their future careers. Reflecting the literature, the inclusion of such activities within undergraduate curricula may lessen the conflict between students' objective work and their aspirations.

Success is an individual concept and can vary for the same person at different times throughout their career. Musicians in the 21st century engage in multiple roles within and outside of the music profession, and should consider the success of their practice on the basis of personal career satisfaction rather than a pre-conceived hierarchy of roles. The study demonstrated that positive teaching experiences within musicians' training increase the likelihood of performance students planning a positive engagement with teaching. It is imperative that the education and training of performance students fosters such engagement and assists students to develop the skills required to meet realistic career goals. This is a difficult task given the increasing financial and time constraints within undergraduate degrees. The unit around which this study was based was allocated only 24-hours of delivery time, and it is encouraging that the integration of education, composition and performance students within an active learning environment resulted in a positive change in attitude towards teaching activities.

As a result of this study, students at The University of Western Australia will refine their teaching artist proposals with a view to the implementation of a schools partnership program in 2007. Further research will strengthen these findings, and it is anticipated that course changes in

2006 and 2007 will enable more students to develop and present educational projects. On a broader scale, findings of this study provide further evidence of the crucial importance of career planning activities within the undergraduate curriculum.

Appendix 2 Questions included in the second survey

1. Please specify your major:

Performance

Education

Composition

2. How do you feel about the potential of taking on a teaching role once you graduate?

Very positive

Very negative

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

3. Has this unit informed your development as a teacher? If so, in what ways?

4. Has your involvement in this unit altered your view of teaching? If so, how?

5. Has your involvement in this unit altered your career goals? If so, how?

6. Do you think that you would incorporate teaching in your career:

a) because of a desire to teach and the acceptance of a teaching role;

b) to supplement inadequate performance work;

c) both; or

d) I would not incorporate teaching in my career.

7. What, if any, do you consider to be the benefits of working with a mixed cohort of education, performance and composition students?

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Dawn Bennett works as a lecturer in music education and performance, as a researcher and as a freelance violist. She holds postgraduate degrees in education and performance, and her PhD study, which asked: 'What is a musician?' was awarded with Distinction in 2005. Dawn has worked extensively as a musician, teacher and manager in the school and university sectors. She held

positions as a violist in England, Adelaide and Canberra prior to lecturing for seven years with Curtin University, where she was Academic Team Leader for Art and Design. Research interests focus on professional practice in music, and the effectiveness of education, training and policies which affect the sustainability of that practice.

Andrea Stanberg works at the School of Music, The University of Western Australia as Lecturer in Music Education. Over the past 18 years, she has worked both in Australia and overseas in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Andrea has been the recipient of various travel and study grants, enabling her to study with Canadian composer/educator, R.Murray Schafer as well as undertaking postgraduate studies at The University of Toronto. Currently a member of the Executive for the Callaway Centre for Music and Music Education; Research Officer for the W.A. State Chapter of ASME and curriculum writer and examiner for the W.A Curriculum Council. Research interests include: pre-service teacher education, international education and a developing interest in Cambodian children's music.