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## 5 Rewriting the score

### How pre-professional work and employability development can improve student thinking

*Jennifer Rowley, Dawn Bennett, and Anna Reid*

#### **Background: Expanding professionalism**

The introductory chapter of this book provides a valuable argument for the concept of expanding professionalism as a driving force in today's training of performing artists. In particular, the authors highlight the ways in which professionalism is increasingly understood to encompass, for example, inter-professional learning, collaborative professionalism, and democratic professionalism. In this chapter we pick up these points through an understanding of six literacies defined by Bennett (2019) as underpinning the professional and individual identity work required to create and sustain employability.

There is a fundamental social and moral turn in the expansion of professionalism proposed in this volume in that it creates a significant change for the performing and creative arts disciplines, adding to the established issues of technical mastery and artistic know-how and having the potential to contribute significantly to the employability agenda of higher music education. It is not unusual for students entering undergraduate music studies to be conscious of what lies ahead in terms of possible career outcomes. School-based and community music making experiences will have already engaged them in musical experiences and styles, which often become the intrinsic motivation to pursue higher education music. Each style and genre can be associated with possible forms of professional work, but an understanding of what these forms of work might entail often comes only after students start their tertiary studies. Students may, for example, find that there is simply not enough music work that focuses on their particular form of expertise. They may discover that their early career aspirations have shifted. They may also realise that in the face of fierce competition for work they have to re-assess their career thinking (Bennett & Hennekam, 2018).

In this chapter we explore how these ideas change for students as they become pre-professional musicians heading towards their professional careers. We position the chapter in line with previous research with similar cohorts, which shows that active identity formation plays an important component in the transition into a professional world (Lau, 2019). We pay particular attention to the ways in which student musicians seek to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to develop skills in re-orientating their learning as career relevance is realised (Reid et al., 2019).

Almost 10,000 students are enrolled in Australian music programmes. As graduates their music work is likely to be organised on a *portfolio* and non-linear basis and to involve multiple concurrent roles (Bridgstock et al., 2015). In line with more general labour market trends, these roles will be variously full or part-time, project-based or permanent, hourly paid casual work, and/or self-employed. It is of course possible for musicians to work as full-time company employees however there are far fewer such positions than applicants (Bennett, 2008; Burland & Davidson, 2004; Gembris, 2004). Rather, many graduates make multiple attempts to establish their careers within a sector rife with persistent inequalities featuring both vertical and horizontal segregation (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015; Scharff, 2018).

This situation highlights the need for institutions to prepare students for the complex work they are likely to encounter as graduates. However, student experiences are rather personal as the sum of their life experience forms their ontological perspective on who they are as musicians and music workers. Taking this perspective, we wonder about the contribution of higher education and the potential labour market to students' sense of being and self, and how these ideas combine to create a professional identity. As Bennet and Bridgstock (2015) suggest, an awareness of the complexities of the musical labour market may also help higher education professionals to target learning experiences that will contribute to student professional identity.

Labour market precarity is not unique to the performing arts; recent research reveals that 89% of Britons changed jobs between the years 2013 and 2018 (ONS [GB], 2018) and 2,000,000 Australians (around 8% of the population) are known to start new jobs and change industries each year in Australia (DIISRT, 2013). Aspiring performing artists need to determine where and how they will shape their careers in line with their values and those of their socio-cultural context. And to succeed, they need to know both how to predict what to learn and how to learn it (Bennett, 2019).

Within this context there is growing acceptance that emerging professionals must engage in explicit discussion about future learning and work during their tertiary studies. Indeed, the tertiary institutions responsible for educating aspiring performing artists need to rise to the challenge and embed career development learning into the curriculum. The focus of this chapter is what needs to change in higher music education if we are to help students to understand and develop the expanded professionalism required to negotiate graduate life.

## **Theoretical framework**

Shown in Figure 5.1, Reid et al.'s (2011) Model of Professional Learning provided a model of professional learning that could be adapted to highlight the research and practice in arts education directly related to tertiary studies and professionalism. The model enabled us to address the urgency to expand our thinking about professionalism and, as a community of practitioners responsible for preparing graduates for the real world of work, to provide the very best industry experiences possible.

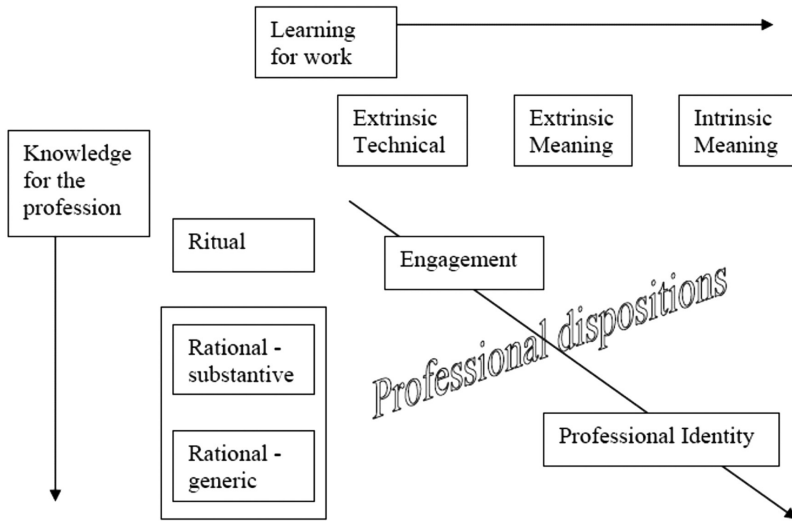


Figure 5.1 Model of Professional Learning (Reid et al., 2011).

We note that it is common to encounter resistance to the term professionalism when thinking about the practising artist, partly because many people have a restricted view of purpose and success in the arts. We propose that the Model of Professional Learning provides a framework for viewing the developing and expanded professionalism of performing artists. In other words, it is not the concept of professional work that we are seeking to redefine but rather how students experience work and anticipate how graduate work will be formed and characterised. The research questions for this study were:

1. In what ways does the Model of Professional Learning impact professional career preparation?
2. How can we support music students to connect with employers in innovative ways?

As stated, the chapter derives its theoretical perspective from a Model of Professional Learning (Reid et al., 2011) that shows how pre-professional students experience *becoming* a professional. Professional formation is a process of identity formation comprising learners' knowledge *for* their potential profession as well as their stance towards work itself. In the model, the orthogonal aspects of *learning for work* and *knowledge for the profession* are mediated by the affordances of their learning situations as well as a gradual development of *professional dispositions* as they progress from study into work. Learners do not pass through these stages timeously but develop, change, and mould their views as they encounter different situations as learners and workers, or simply through living.

The orthogonal aspects of the model generate some interesting ideas about a learner's personal stance *towards* work and also the sort of work that it is. The space between these dimensions represents the idea of professional dispositions—for example, creativity, ethics, sustainability and cross-cultural sensitivity—that expert students develop and will make greater use of in their working lives. The diagonal direction refers to concepts of identity relating to an experienced student and novice professional, and to engagement with studies and profession. The model combines the two aspects of learning for professional work and knowledge in the specific discipline and profession, interacting in the notions of identity and engagement.

The arrows also represent a certain hierarchy of experience and knowledge. In the horizontal dimension, the narrowest conception of learning, discipline, and the relationships between them, the *extrinsic technical*, is contained in the broader *extrinsic meaning* conception, which in turn is subsumed by the most expansive *intrinsic meaning* view. In the vertical dimension, the most limited *ritual* knowledge can be viewed as specific knowledge whose function has not (yet) been explained and usually involves repetition of seemingly essential tasks (such as writing out key signatures by hand); this is then contained in the *rational substantive* knowledge of a particular discipline (for instance, classical harmonic practice); this in its turn is included in the notion of *rational generic* knowledge, whose application is broader than the particular discipline (such as writing/playing music as a form of communication). The diagonal line in the model denotes the increasing engagement with university studies and the professional role, and the development of concepts of identity as an experienced student and a novice professional.

How we connect the orthogonal model to a wider theory (e.g. to that of a “learning profession”) demonstrates the impact of significant “others” in the development of professionals. This in fact allows connections between the novice to professional trajectory and what unfolds within a lifelong professional career to become more explicit.

An important concept behind the development of the theoretical model is that the model was derived from *students'* descriptions of their understanding and experience of learning and how they experienced their early work (Reid et al., 2011). The top left-hand side of the model represents students who had a rather limited understanding of their potential profession, which in turn limited the ways in which they went about preparing for their profession. Conversely, students who had a clear and informed understanding of their future work were able to focus on the forms of learning that would facilitate their entry into work. Those students who could be represented in the lower right side of the model simply had very much wider and richer learning experiences on which to draw. Curiously, understanding what future work is about impacted their deep approach to learning during formal studies. Students who did not have an idea of the complexity and possibilities of future work were limited in their approach to learning.

Of interest, Reid and colleagues (2011) found that the discipline and habitual approaches to teaching in that discipline formed students' impressions of what

was of key importance for their future profession; students who experienced a limiting form of pedagogy also demonstrated a limited agency when they entered their new work environments. Similarly, when the pedagogical approach focused more on broad, meaningful, creative ways of encountering the discipline, student agency was also expanded, readying them for their new profession. The pedagogical dilemma then is how to engage students with formal activities that will enable them to understand the complexity of their future profession and the ways in which they develop agentic thinking for their future life and work.

The use of Bennett's (2018) employABILITY framework with our current cohort of students provided a strengths-based means by which students could develop a reflective approach and agentic thinking. The framework redefines employability within the higher education (tertiary) context as a strength-based, metacognitive approach to employability development delivered within the existing curriculum. The approach prompts students to understand why they think the way they think, how to critique and learn the unfamiliar, and how their values, beliefs and assumptions can inform and be informed by their learning, lives, and careers. Rather than focus on learners' potential to be employed and directed by others, the approach focuses on learners' ability to create and sustain meaningful work across the career lifespan. This "employability thinking" (Bennett 2019) is as relevant to workers in traditional, full-time employment with a single employer as it is to workers who combine multiple roles to create portfolios of work, as is so often the case in music. In the study reported here, students' ability to reimagine what their musical world could mean and how their own capabilities and creativity could be utilised is evident in their responses.

### **Undergraduate music students transition to career professional**

Unpacking music students' stories of transitioning from an expert student to novice professional can release the essential ingredients required in creating an individual's recipe for achieving personal career goals (Rowley et al., 2017). Through internships and formal, mandatory practicums such as professional experience placements, students experience the "space" between formal study and the world that may contain their future career or job.

In line with the congruence between informed normative conceptions and developmental goals (Heckhausen, 1997), the transition between these spaces is more effective for students who utilise their agency and information to maximise the opportunities afforded to them. There is a corresponding need to challenge students to transform their thinking from one space (e.g. expert learner) to another (pre-professional) using the knowledge and capabilities developed throughout their music studies and experiences. Alongside this is the need for students to develop an awareness of their competence or expertise in relation to professional norms. As educators, scaffolding this awareness—particularly when students question their efficacy and achievement goals—demands explicit conversations through which students can begin to realise who they are and what they are becoming as a professional.

### ***Creativity***

The preparation of music students includes creativity as an essential artistic and professional graduate disposition, often related to high-quality student outcomes. Our previous research suggests that creativity is a “bundle” of elements that incorporates personal ability, process, and product. Creativity is not a single simply understood and enacted thing and our research (Bennett et al., 2015) recognises that creation, creativity, and creativities focus on individual, group, disciplinary, and inter/intra-disciplinary environments.

Creativity can be understood as a characteristic of a person—but this is domain specific as some people can be inclined to creative thinking, or sewing, or art, or mathematics, and so on. By “domain specific”, however, we mean that others that have know-how in that domain recognise it as having the spark of something novel. Creativity can also be an artefact of group-work and group-thinking. Within this orientation, creativity is something that is generated through negotiated action toward a novel outcome.

Creativity recognises the multiplicity of different elements (persons, processes, products, social environments, etc.) that encapsulate the novel in all its forms. For pre-professional and professional musicians, creativity (in all its forms) becomes a means of distinguishing one musician from another. Professional musicians have a work advantage if they are recognised to have an element of difference, novelty, or innovation. But how do students develop creativity in the context of preparation for the world of work? We posited that by working with strength-based employability resources, our students have a better chance of deliberately targeting creativity as a professional disposition that is key to their future employability.

### ***Development of identity***

As the Model of Professional Learning indicates, students’ musical identity develops during their tertiary studies. In the context of learning we can expect that students’ musical identity will change during their studies and that this identity will inform their future professional thinking. Juuti and Littleton (2010) analysed tertiary music students’ early experiences of music study to understand the processes in becoming a musician and found that the transition in identity is relational to “self”. Knowles (1992), in a study focusing on pre-service teachers, emphasised the importance of teachers’ sense of “self” to ensuring the development of a positive teacher identity. This is because teacher identity is constructed from what we learn in pre-service teacher education and how we were taught as school students. In another study of “self”, Viczko and Wright (2010) explored the ambiguity surrounding the identity transformation of graduate students who “become” teacher educators as a way of fostering educative understanding of professional identity. Viczko and Wright noted that students’ self-perceptions of teaching styles develop in relation to specific learning contexts as they come to see themselves as a professional in music education: that is, an individual professional identity. Students’ development of their musical identity as “pre-service” contributes to the ways in which they will be able to engage with professional work.

The nature of professional work in the creative and performing arts, including music, demonstrates the need for students to develop multiple competencies outside their discipline's traditional trajectory. For example, musicians often hold a portfolio of roles which combine to create full-time work (performance, teaching, administration, etc.). Therefore, as the professional musician emerges they may find the need for capabilities such as the capacity to create and manage a small business, the resilience to sustain intermittent and complex work, the social awareness and creativity needed to generate opportunities within and beyond the arts sector, and acceptance that a sustainable career is likely to involve work unrelated to the arts (Reid et al., 2019).

Multiple authors note that arts graduates, in fact, report not having the broad range of knowledge or experience required upon graduation (Bull, 2018; Comunian et al., 2015; Young et al., 2019). We assert that music educators need to adapt their thinking and consequently their preparation of music graduates so that aspiring musicians understand the realities of work for today's professional musician. It is only through talking about and providing opportunities in professional practice that we might all better understand what graduate work might look like and how students prepare for it.

The nature of music work such as that described above presents considerable challenges to graduates' sense of professional self and their identity. Solomonides and Reid (2009) observed that the presence of identity as simultaneously singular and multiple is seen in both practising and aspiring musicians. As such, a student's sense of being and sense of transformation form the ontological core of identity and engagement, and around this are epistemological spokes such as professional knowledge, discipline knowledge, and engagement. Students who are imagining and preparing for a professional career will think about extrinsic factors such as how to manage a job or career. They will also engage in thoughts about the intrinsic aspects of self and identity. The synergies between professional learning preparation and a "sense of self", and possibly an "ideal self", commit students to seeking an answer to who they are (Rowley & Munday, 2014).

It is vital, therefore, that students develop a sense of self and that this emerges as a core component of professional preparation in higher education creative and performing arts programmes. Despite the increasing prevalence of precarious, non-standard work, however, little attention has been paid to graduates who encounter discontinuous work identities or how they otherwise deviate from socially scripted or highly institutionalised trajectories (Fugate et al., 2004). Moving beyond theoretical perspectives, we wondered how students experience employability and how this might be understood through the materials they produced during engagement with a formal employability programme.

## **Procedures**

The study described in this chapter explores tertiary music students' employability profiles from participating students who were enrolled at a city conservatorium in Australia. Of the 36 students, seven were enrolled in their master's degree, four



were in their honours (fourth) year and 25 were undergraduate music majors (28 female and 12 male). The students were soon to engage in an industry internship, or placement. Twenty-seven students identified as music performance majors, four as music composition majors, and five as music education majors; two students were undertaking double degrees with a second major outside music.

Students responded to Bennett's (2019) social cognitive measure of perceived employability, creating personalised profiles using an online self-assessment tool comprised of 135 items and five open response questions (see Bennett & Ananthram, 2021). Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS v16 to determine the weighted mean of each employability traits. The literacies, traits and open questions are summarised to follow:

*Basic literacy*

Career thinking, personal self-efficacy, and academic self-efficacy;

*Rhetorical literacy*

Interpersonal skills, disciplinary and digital knowledge, skills, and practices;

*Personal and critical literacy*

Problem solving, decision-making, goal setting, and goal achievement;

*Emotional literacy*

Recognising, understanding, and responding to the feelings of self and others;

*Occupational literacy*

Informed career thinking, lifestyle choices, career commitment, and flexibility;

*Ethical, cultural, and social literacy*

Ethically, culturally, and socially acceptable behaviours and values.

Open questions:

Q1: Please tell us about your work and career until now.

Q2: Why did you choose your major (discipline)?

Q3: How long do you think you'll work in your major (discipline), once you graduate?

Q4: Beyond your studies, what are you doing to prepare for graduate life and work?

Q5: If you were designing your degree programme, what would you change or add?

Following Strauss and Corbin (1990), analysis of the open data began with complete readings of each case. Inductive coding revealed themes for which the researchers may not have looked (Rivas, 2012) and the initial codebook was modified in line with each new case. Next, the authors coded the entire dataset deductively, using the Model of Professional Learning. The initial codebook and deductive analysis were then combined. Ethical approvals were obtained prior to the study and students had the choice not to include their responses in the research dataset.

## Results: Occupational literacy

Shown at Figure 5.2, students were relatively confident in each of the six broad domains, or literacies. They were least confident in the area of occupational literacy, which relates to career awareness and occupational flexibility and commitment.

Students’ open responses confirm that they are aware of the precarious nature of music careers and frustrated that they don’t know how best to prepare themselves. The following quote is illustrative of this sentiment.

Most of us don’t know what we’re doing and we’re all really scared because we want to be successful but fear the worst.

This student is describing the lack of a compass and has implications for how educators might adopt a scaffolded approach to career orientation. Without a guided sense of what’s next, many students felt unprepared to navigate the impending future away from their studies and into the real world of musicians’ work. One of our students wrote:

I think most students, particularly undergraduate, are just terrified of the future and the unknown re. careers and employment. Almost every day I feel pretty intense pressure and fear about not getting employment in the industry I love.

The student’s comment demonstrates the importance of undertaking explicit career development work. The early interest in music genre and style is supplanted

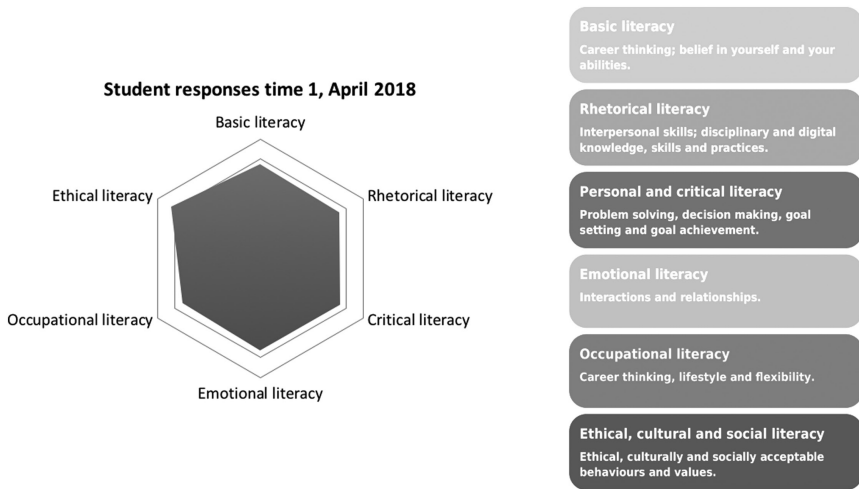


Figure 5.2 Confidence levels at time 1, pre-placement (n=36).

towards the end of tertiary study with the concerns of making a livelihood. Understanding this dilemma as educators ensures that we can address student concerns directly. Another of our students wrote:

Students tend to be pressured by university choices and financial stability for the future. We need to understand this but still encourage a creative lifestyle despite negative connotations surrounding arts as a career.

Students' concerns about the future highlight their readiness for explicit career development learning, including that which takes them outside their genres and familiar contexts and into society. Students' comments about what they would change in their degree programmes revealed more practical aspects relating to subject and teacher choices. A realistic viewpoint of this next student demonstrates how aware they are of the challenge ahead:

Students need to be equipped on how to face the real world. Too often they become specialist in their field but they don't know how to manage money, how to be able to live a sustainable and great life. But instead, in our field we all look down and make jokes like "no work in music ..."

Throughout tertiary training, student musicians are afforded opportunities to think critically as they prepare compositions, research performative techniques to improve their practice, and seek out new challenges. In reality, proactive transitions away from traditional forms of employment are relatively rare in music. In higher education, the responsibility of preparing students for their future lives and work has rested largely with the student and not with the institution. We suggest that students need to feel confident in their own musical and professional identity so that they can allow the two to guide them securely into future work.

### **Discussion of results: Creating professional ideals and values**

Understanding social categorisation (stratification), gender, culture, and workplace norms are all key components in the mix for successful work. It is not enough to simply be an excellent craftsperson (musician, composer, educator, etc.); graduates must also have a honed set of professional capabilities that ensure a broad understanding of others. In fact, professional identity includes acquiring insight into professional functioning (practices) and creating professional ideals and values. This can be defined as attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, and skills that are common among a professional group of people who have a skillset in common.

Musical identity refers to the way music is seen in the development of individual identity (MacDonald et al., 2002). Musical identity does not refer to musical likes or dislikes and is influenced by self-concept and is constructed (and re-constructed) by making comparisons with others. As a result, identities in music are often based on social categories and/or cultural musical practices, as may be evident in music students who study in conservatoires (MacDonald et al., 2002). To

develop self-awareness and artistic identity, says Bennett (2016b, p. 14), students must come to realise who they might become in the future: “only by questioning the dominant narratives can students learn how to navigate careers that demand an entrepreneurial and resilient mindset”. The indication here is that the professional identity formation of a musician is not an automatic realisation and that aspiring creative workers require explicit guidance.

Bennett (2009) reported the competency of musicians in professional practice by noting the skills required by music students to engage in a sustainable career. Throughout the transition from expert learner to beginning professional it is seen that identity is consistently re-fined (Rowley et al., 2017). Through well-designed curriculum and scaffolded learning experiences, students will begin to value their professional practice and take ownership of their knowledge as this not only enhances their view of self-worth but also leads them towards enhancing their self-concept and related internal rewards and external capabilities.

The provocation in the title of this chapter is to “rewrite the score”. The score can be understood as students’ trajectories into work. Traditionally this has generated tertiary studies focused on individual musical (technical) competence and the development of expertise in specific musical genres. Using the Model of Professional Learning we can see how students’ learning environment contributes to the development of a professional identity. The employABILITY framework, meanwhile, has provided a practical means for students to reflect on musical practice in relation to the exigencies of work and to exercise their developmental agency by using a strength-based approach. As a result, the students are better prepared to rewrite the score.

In viewing the results from a theoretical lens we note that, in general, social cognitive theory holds that other person variables such as outcome expectations and personal goals also play important roles in helping people to guide their own behaviour. Outcome expectations can be thought of as beliefs about the outcomes of various courses of action, whereas goals involve one’s determination or intention to pursue a particular course of action. These additional social cognitive variables have received far less attention than has self-efficacy in relation to academic progress in STEM fields.

In an effort to incorporate a wider range of social cognitive mechanisms and processes in the study of academic and career behaviour, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) developed social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Lent et al. (2016) later applied the social cognitive model of career self-management to career exploration and decision-making. The authors concluded that students perceive the process of career decision-making in less complex terms than do theorists and careers counsellors: indeed, they found that many students bypass intentional career exploration or limit their thinking to a few salient options. Moreover, students embark on an ongoing assessment of self and career information without necessarily reconciling the two.

Our study suggests that reconciling self and career is a crucial and neglected aspect of career decision-making. The importance of understanding the professional self in tandem with career decision-making is exactly what Lent et al. (2016)

argue by determining the effects of learning are directly related to future career thinking and are cognitively mediated. This can be directly related to results from this study as basically we need a systematic and explicit approach to employability that is mindful of students' developmental stages and open to exploration.

### **Conclusion: Creating a personalised employability profile**

Through an exploration of the data we have been led to determine that the transitioning from student to professional is a complex task that requires scaffolded support and opportunities for authentic work placement opportunities that promote professional skills development such as leadership, a pre-disposition to sharing talent (for example, mentoring), expertise, and learning practices with others in preparation for future careers in music (Rowley & Bennett, 2016). Through a re-imaging of future “self” within a domain of multiple identities, students identified individual abilities emerging as a result of professional practice opportunities (see also Bennett & Ferns, 2017) to explore employability through the process of creating a personalised employability profile before their internship experience.

Adequately scaffolded work-integrated-learning through formal internship programmes provides curriculum enhancement allowing the sample group of undergraduate music students to image their future “self” and to engage in the space between expert student and novice professional (e.g. autonomy, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, etc.). The inclusion of some form of experiential learning in the education of professional musicians (for example an internship) can have an impact on the development of the professional as it has the capacity to enable student musicians to develop essential, transferable skills such as workplace negotiation, oral and written communication, teamwork, and problem solving. Moreover, students are enabled to reimagine what their musical professional world might look like and how their own capabilities and creativity might emerge as they begin work. We note at this point that skills identified by employers as being vital to a successful transition to a career are the same skills identified by practising musicians as vital to leading complex careers within and beyond the music industry, often from the point of graduation.

The comments reported in this chapter suggest that students are seeking opportunities to develop broader profiles and capacities, but in order to do this the potential roles need to come into view. Whereas the arts are undoubtedly a game changer, students' preparation to undertake the role of change agent is currently insufficient. A well-structured and explicit exploration of professionalism would better prepare students as both future professionals and future change agents – individuals who are equipped to write the score on which their future decision making is based.

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