

Effective Teacher Attributes: Perceptions Of Early-Career And Pre-Service Music Teachers

Scott Harrison

Griffith University

Julie Ballantyne

Australian Catholic University

In the current climate of Australian teacher education, reviews of both music education and teacher education training are high on the political agenda. In addition there is a well-documented need to research the best ways to prepare music teachers (Asmus, 2000), particularly reflecting the needs of pre-service and early-career teachers (Yourn, 2000). No studies to date have been conducted comparing pre-service and early-career teachers' perceptions of their needs in relation to knowledge and skills (teacher attributes). This paper examines the desirable attributes of effective teachers from the perspectives of pre-service and early-career music teachers and draws conclusions for the reconceptualisation of pre-service teacher education courses.

Introduction

Teacher education has been under significant review in Australia in recent years (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 2001; Grieshaber et al., 2000; Ramsey, 2000). In announcing the *Inquiry into Teacher Training*, the Federal education minister set an agenda that will:

examine very carefully the philosophical underpinnings of teacher training in Australia, the extent to which our teachers are being supported in their training when they attend schools for practicum, the way in which schools are actually delivering mentoring and support to teachers that are in training. Overall the committee will be inquiring directly into the way in which teachers are being prepared in terms of not just specific skills but the philosophies and scientific rigour of teacher training in Australia (Nelson, 2005).

In addition, as a result of the McMeniman (2004) report, universities in Queensland are being asked to restructure graduate programs in education to fit a one-year model. Furthermore, there will be implications from the National Review of School Music (2004) that asked for extensive responses regarding the adequacy of teacher preparation. These three recent initiatives, combined with the processes of re-conceptualisation and reformation of teacher education brought about by research at the turn of the century, increase the significance of an inquiry into the attributes of effective music teachers. For the purposes of this study, teacher attributes are defined as the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective teachers.

Research by Hargreaves, Welch, Purves, and Marshall (2003b) indicates that the professional identities of music teachers are consolidated within the pre-service music course (changing very little once they reach their first teaching post). Specifically in music, Hargreaves and Marshall (2003a) found that as pre-service teachers become early-career teachers, perceptions of the required skills for successful music teaching changed with teachers increasingly emphasising communication and interpersonal rather than musical performance skills. Other researchers have also confirmed the desire for teachers to possess teaching and personal skills (Hamann, Baker, McAllister, & Bauer, 2000; Teachout, 1997; Harrison, 2003, 2004).

Previous research has shown that pre-service and early-career music teachers feel that their preparation was lacking in several areas (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Marks, 1998; Brophy, 2002; Russell-Bowie, 2004). An examination of course content undertaken by Temmerman (1997) argues that there are disparities and inconsistencies in pre-service teacher education courses. Such disparities and inconsistencies have the capacity to adversely affect early-career teachers' perception of their role, resulting in early departure from the profession (Ballantyne, 2004) and pre-service teachers' preparedness for the workforce. Through examining pre-service and early-career music teachers' perceptions on their professional identity through

research of this nature, it is possible to redesign teacher education programs so that early-career teachers continue to develop as successful teachers.

Other studies (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004) have explored the effectiveness of four aspects of pre-service courses – the *pedagogical content knowledge and skills* (knowledge and skills pertaining specifically to the teaching of music in the classroom), *non-pedagogical professional knowledge and skills* (non-pedagogical or musical knowledge and skills required of music teachers), *music knowledge and skills*, and *general pedagogical knowledge and skills* (non-discipline specific pedagogical knowledge and skills). The perceived effectiveness of these four areas varied. In terms of improving teacher education courses, it was found that the knowledge and skills that related specifically to learning how to teach music and how to cope with the professional aspects of a music teacher's job was of most importance to early-career teachers.

In a similar vein, Harrison's (2004) research indicates that there were a number of areas of skills, knowledge and attributes that pre-service and experienced teachers described as being important. These included:

- Knowledge of content, pedagogy, repertoire and curriculum documents
- Management skills incorporating organisation, behaviour management, time management and human resource management
- Skills in managing technology
- Possession of a range of teaching styles
- Reflective skills for self evaluation and improvement
- Practical music skills in a variety of genres and including sight-reading, singing, conducting, composition and arrangement.
- Capacity to motivate, inspire and encourage
- Connection with students as people (p. 204).

This paper builds on the knowledge and skills deemed important by early-career teachers (Ballantyne, 2004) and the development of attributes as identified by Harrison (2004) within the context of teacher education courses.

Context for the research

This research was undertaken in Queensland, Australia. Teachers in Queensland attend university for a minimum of four years. Most students training to become music teachers complete undergraduate qualifications in music, and combine this with degrees in Education. The three universities that train most secondary music teachers in Queensland are the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the University of Queensland (UQ) and Griffith University (GU). Accreditation of teacher education programs is regulated by the Board of Teacher Registration, which results in significant similarities in the content and design of the pre-service programs at the universities in this study.

Method

This paper reports on pre-service and early-career music teachers' experiences of their courses. Data was gathered through interviews (Stage 1) and questionnaires (Stage 2). These methods were similar in that they both focussed on eliciting perceptions regarding important categories of knowledge skills required for effective teaching. The methodology for each stage is described below.

Stage 1: Interviews

This stage of the research involved interviews with 14 pre-service teachers at Griffith University (GU). Interview respondents were selected for their willingness to participate in interviews and to represent varied learning experiences. Approximately 50% the group were undergraduates with at least 2 years of music-specific training. The remaining participants were graduate-entry education students with at least three years of undergraduate qualifications in music. No participant had taken practicum experience at the time the interviews were undertaken but small proportion had limited experience of studio teaching of music.

The interviews were designed to explore the perceptions of pre-service secondary music teachers regarding the knowledge and skills they require to function effectively in the classroom and their expectations of their pre-service teacher education program in delivering and developing these. It was also anticipated that discussion of these issues prior to a practicum experience would enhance the professional experience component of the course.

The interview questions utilized semi-structured questioning, based on Patton's (2002) *interview guide approach*. In practice, this meant that all interviewees were asked identical questions, but additional questions were also used to elaborate, probe and expand on particular topics where necessary. This flexibility ensured that important and salient topics were not excluded and also provided structure to ensure comparability of responses. The stimulus questions relevant to this paper were:

1. What do you hope to gain out of your pre-service teacher education course?
2. What skills and attributes do you believe it is important for music teachers to possess?

Stage 2: Questionnaires

As part of a larger study, a questionnaire was designed to explore the perceptions of early-career secondary music teachers regarding the knowledge and skills they require to function effectively in the classroom and the effectiveness of their pre-service teacher education program in developing these.

This paper reports findings from a subset of four questions within this instrument, focusing specifically on participants' qualitative ratings of:

- (a) the most useful aspects of their pre-service preparation;
- (b) the ways that these aspects had been useful;
- (c) the least useful aspects of their pre-service course; and
- (d) the ways that these aspects had not been useful.

The questionnaire was distributed to 136 early-career secondary classroom music teachers who undertook their pre-service education in Queensland and had graduated in the years 1998 to mid 2002 from Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the University of Queensland (UQ) and Griffith University (GU). It is estimated that this list includes more than 90% of the early-career music teachers currently teaching in Queensland (17% from GU, 44% from QUT, 39% from UQ, 75% female). Completed responses were returned by 76 people (response rate of 56%).

Respondents to the questionnaire had similar demographics to those expected from early-career music teachers teaching in Queensland, *viz.*, approximately 17% from GU, 40% from QUT, 40% from UQ and 78% female. In addition, the spread of experience of respondents was fairly even with 22.4% having taught for one year, 34.2% having taught for two years, 21.1% having taught for three years, and 22.4% having taught for four years.

Data analysis

The data from both studies was subjected to content analysis (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001) to identify themes, concepts and meanings (Burns, 2000). It was the purpose of this study to find similarities and differences between the themes emerging of pre-service and early-career music teachers' perceptions of the desirable attributes of effective music teachers.

Results and discussion

Stage 1

This stage of the research focussed on what students in 2005 expected to gain from their course and what they perceived to be the important knowledge, skills and attributes of effective music teachers. In response to the questions "*What do you hope to gain out of your pre-service teacher education course?*" and "*What skills and attributes do you believe it is important for music teachers to possess?*" included:

- teaching strategies – how to teach knowledge and skills
- knowledge of preparation and planning techniques
- practical knowledge of which techniques will work in the classroom and the opportunity to practice these techniques
- organisation skills
- assessment strategies
- capacity to develop appropriate resources.

Analysis and further discussion revealed that pedagogical knowledge and skills (i.e. the knowledge and skills required to teach concepts) were considered by most participants to be the most important in the pre-service program. The understanding of which knowledge and skills to choose was also considered

useful. To a lesser extent, participants reflected on the need to develop resources, organisation skills and assessment strategies. These were considered important aspects of the pre-service teacher education program, but with the exception of assessment strategies, these elements were identified as not necessarily being provided as part of the formal university program.

A smaller but still significant number of students suggested that the course should focus on the area of musical knowledge and skills such as:

- the need to develop aural skills
- the capacity to understand and represent the cultural and social location of music in Australian society
- the opportunity to broaden musical skills and knowledge
- the ability to apply musical knowledge to the practical environment.

Of these, the most significant response was in relation to broadening musical skills and knowledge, followed by the understanding and transmission of cultural and social aspects of music. Bearing in mind that all these participants had undertaken at least 2 years of training in aural musicianship, practical musicianship and music history, this is a relevant finding and raises questions as to the location of music education training within universities. The extent to which music education programs are housed within music faculties or education faculties is the subject of continuing investigation by the researchers. Furthermore, the placement of music knowledge and skills within pre-service teacher education needs further investigation, as it is currently located primarily at the beginning of the education degree or purely within the undergraduate music program. Given the need for the application of *pedagogical and musical knowledge and skills* as clearly being of importance in the perceptions of pre-service teachers, approaching practicum as an opportunity to "practice" knowledge micro-teaching and practicum experiences is considered highly relevant.

In order to begin to provide some longitudinal data for future reflection and analysis, a comparison of the results from the Harrison (2004) with the responses from 2005 was undertaken. It possible to draw the following conclusions in relation to skills, knowledge and attributes perceived to be significant by pre-service teachers in the 2004 and 2005 cohorts.

- knowledge of content, pedagogy, repertoire and curriculum documents
- possession of a range of teaching styles to cope with diversity
- practical music skills in a broad range of genres and including strong musicianship skills
- organisational skills
- capacity to develop confidence, motivational skills and attributes
- connection with students as people
- capacity to develop appropriate physical, content-specific and human resources.

Further research is required in this aspect of the study to ascertain the extent to which the findings of this research can be supported longitudinally in the development of teacher education programs. It is anticipated that the 2004 and 2005 cohorts of pre-service teachers (all of whom are yet to commence full-time employment) will be tracked into their first few years of teaching to provide further data as to whether their perceptions change as they enter the profession. In the interim, the results from stage 2 (below) provide an insight into the perceptions of early-career teachers.

Stage 2

The first question reported on in this stage of the research was an open-ended short response item that asked early-career respondents to identify three aspects of their pre-service course that had been the most useful to them since they had started teaching.

Analysis revealed that the practicum was by far the most useful aspect of the pre-service program. This is the area of the pre-service program where students are able to apply the knowledge and skills learnt in university directly to the music classroom. There is also a strong emphasis on the usefulness of knowledge and skills associated with teaching music, with repertoire and resource development, planning lessons and work plans, music teaching techniques and aural perception skills being rated as very important. It is interesting that all except two categories of the top seven mentioned are explicitly covered in music curriculum units. These two categories are behaviour management techniques and knowledge of learners

and their characteristics. As such, from the analysis of this question it seems that the areas mentioned reflect a desire for an applied course that is grounded within the context of the secondary music classroom.

Table 1

Frequencies of areas mentioned as being the most useful to early-career teachers

CATEGORY DESCRIPTOR	% OF RESPONSES
Practicum	43.4%
Behaviour management	23.7%
Repertoire and resource development	22.4%
Planning lessons and work plans	21.1%
Knowledge of learners and their characteristics	13.2%
Music teaching techniques	11.8%
Networking	11.8%
Aural perceptions skills	10.5%
Skills on classroom instruments	9.2%

Early-career music teachers' answers to the question – "*In what ways have [the things you found to be useful] been useful to you?*" – reveal that developing new and varied strategies, resources and repertoire for teaching are viewed as important (see Table 2). Respondents felt that this should be combined with 'hands-on' experience (in the classroom).

Table 2

Frequencies of responses to the question "In what ways have [the things you found to be useful] been useful to you?"

CATEGORY DESCRIPTOR	% OF RESPONSES
Developing new and varied strategies, resources and repertoire for teaching	38.2%
'Hands-on' experience	28.9%
Help with classroom and behaviour management	13.2%
Confidence in content knowledge/skills	13.2%
Knowing how to teach	11.8%
Ability to adapt to the teaching environment	11.8%
ability to plan/organise performance and extra-curricular events	11.8%

As well as being 'hands-on', early-career music teachers mentioned the need for the pre-service course to help them develop new and varied teaching strategies, resources and repertoire for teaching, enabling them to know *how* to teach. Teachers also feel the need to develop the skills and knowledge to be able to adapt to the teaching environment as well as the skills to plan and organise performance and extra-curricular events. The practicum is identified as being of particular importance in terms of developing 'hands-on' knowledge and skills, as it enables pre-service music teachers to develop 'relevant' skills and knowledge pertaining to classroom and behaviour management and the music knowledge and skills so essential to successful classroom practice.

The areas of the pre-service course that were viewed as least useful to early-career music teachers were those that dealt with generic teaching skills and knowledge. Interestingly, a large percentage of respondents cited knowledge of learners and their characteristics to be an area that was least useful to them, although it was also viewed as being the most useful area (by other respondents). In this context, however, it was commonly referred to in the context of specific subjects that dealt with this, indicating that although respondents can see the purpose of this aspect of the course, it is not being dealt with as they would like (see Table 3).

Table 3

Frequencies of categories mentioned as being not useful to early-career teachers

CATEGORY DESCRIPTOR	% OF RESPONSES
Generic teaching skills/knowledge	32.9%
Knowledge of learners and their characteristics	20.5%
Ability to plan for effective learning	11.0%
Knowledge of educational purposes and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds	9.6%

Responses to the question *in what ways have [the things you raised] been not useful to you since you started teaching?* - did not raise any new issues and served to confirm that early-career teachers view subjects where theory is not linked to real life and teaching practice as least useful to their needs .

The consistencies of responses to questions (which were all qualitative, and placed at the beginning of the questionnaire) suggest that early-career teachers have a clear idea about what is important to them in an effective music teacher education course. It is important to these teachers that they have a course which prepares them for the realities of their future career by:

- providing opportunities to develop the applied skills and knowledge to teach in the secondary music classroom; and
- cope with the extra responsibilities such as extra-curricular commitments expected in their career.

The perceptions of both pre-service and early-career teachers are represented in Table 4. The purpose of presenting results in this fashion is to clearly extrapolate similarities and differences between the two groups of participants for the purposes of further analysis and discussion below.

Table 4

Comparison and combination of pre-service and early-career teachers' perceptions

EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS' CATEGORIES	PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' CATEGORIES	COMBINED CATEGORIES
Knowing how to teach Music teaching techniques	How to teach knowledge and skills; The ability to apply musical knowledge to practice	Pedagogical content skills and knowledge
Planning lessons and work plans	Knowledge of preparation and planning techniques	Planning skills and knowledge
Practicum 'hands-on' experience	Practical knowledge of which techniques will; the opportunity to practice these techniques	Contextual knowledge and skills
Classroom and behaviour management; Ability to plan/organise performance and extra-curricular events	Organisation skills	Management knowledge and skills
Repertoire and resource development Developing new and varied strategies, resources and repertoire for teaching	Capacity to develop appropriate resources	Repertoire and resource development
Aural perceptions skills; confidence in content knowledge/skills	Develop aural skills; broaden musical skills and knowledge Understanding and representing the cultural and social location of music in Australian society Assessment strategies	Musical skills and knowledge
Capacity to adapt to the teaching environment Networking		
Knowledge of learners and their characteristics Skills on classroom instruments		

Discussion

The results indicate that pre-service and early-career teachers share similar beliefs about the important aspects of pre-service teacher education courses. The similarities in responses indicate a consistent perception of the work of music teachers and reveals that discipline specialisation is a significant aspect of effective music teacher attributes. In particular the categories of *pedagogical content knowledge and skills*, *contextual knowledge and skills*, *repertoire and resource development*, *musical knowledge and skills* reflect the importance of specialisation.

The remaining categories (*planning knowledge and skills* and *management knowledge and skills*) imply some reference to the specific context of music teachers. Within the category of *management knowledge and skills*, early-career teachers point to the importance of planning and organising performance and extra-curricular events. This consistent with the findings of Ballantyne (2001) and Wheeley (2004) who argue that music teachers in Queensland secondary schools experience difficulties associated with the expectations of extra-curricular programs.

Within the category of *planning knowledge and skills*, early-career teachers list planning lessons and work plans as useful – again indicating a subject specific focus to their perceptions of important skills and knowledge for music teachers. This same emphasis on discipline specialisation was not evident in the responses from pre-service teachers, which was surprising, given that early-career music teachers frequently teach in areas other than music and that many pre-service teachers were fresh from undergraduate music degrees.

Categories mentioned by only pre-service or early-career teachers (not both) include *assessment strategies*, *the capacity to understand and represent the cultural and social location of music in Australian society*, *the ability to adapt to the teaching environment*, *networking*, *knowledge of learners and their characteristics*, and *skills on classroom instruments*. Pre-service teachers focussed on *assessment strategies* and *the capacity to understand and represent the cultural and social location of music in Australian society*. This could be related to the content covered in curriculum subjects immediately prior to the interviews or that the senior music syllabus is very assessment oriented, and may cause consternation among 1st year tertiary students. More research into these categories is necessary to substantiate these hypotheses.

Early-career teachers focussed on *the ability to adapt to the teaching environment*, *networking*, *knowledge of learners and their characteristics*, and *skills on classroom instruments*. The categories dealing with *the ability to adapt to the teaching environment* and *networking* may reflect early-career teachers' socialisation experiences. Their emphasis of developing *skills on classroom instruments* suggests that early-career music teachers view useful skills to be related to their teaching specialisation. The category *knowledge of learners and their characteristics*, may suggest that their perception of useful knowledge and skills is not entirely discipline specific, and that early-career music teachers see the value in the psychology of learning, whereas this category did not emerge from the interviews with pre-service teachers.

Conclusion

There appears to be a high degree of similarity between the responses of the pre-service teachers and the early career teachers. While not necessarily articulated in the same terms, both groups considered providing opportunities to develop the applied skills and knowledge to teach in the secondary music classroom to be significant in teacher preparation courses

The early-career music teachers (perhaps due to their experience in the classroom) felt that teacher education courses should enable music teachers to cope with the extra responsibilities such as extra-curricular commitments expected in their workplace. This was evidenced through the mention of the need to develop the ability to plan/organise performance and extra-curricular events. The extent to which pre-service teachers embrace this need after their practicum and beginning experiences as teachers will be worthy of observation and documentation.

Given that the research design was slightly different for stage 1 and stage 2, it is difficult to draw extensive conclusions for application across a range of contexts. This research has however, begun the template for pre-service teacher education based on the perspectives of two significant stakeholder groups. Further research with pre-service teachers, early-career teachers and experienced teachers is required to further validate the outcomes of this project. In addition, the role of community, home, schools and universities needs to be taken into account in enhancing these qualities and attributes.

¹ For the purpose of this study, early-career teachers are those teachers in their first four years of teaching.

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