Chapter 1

THE DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF MUSIC EDUCATION AND MUSIC TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

To become a music teacher in Queensland secondary schools, it is necessary to qualify at a tertiary level. The coursework paths that preservice teachers take prior to graduating as music teachers are found within the accredited education degrees, and although preservice teacher education courses in Queensland are regularly evaluated and upgraded, the effectiveness of music teacher education has not been considered separately. Furthermore, changes to the tertiary music teacher education curriculum have been at best haphazard and unsupported by research. This article argues that music education is distinctive within the school curriculum and as such music teachers and preservice music teachers require specialist skills to teach the subjects effectively. As a result, it is argued that the nature of preservice music teacher education differs from general preservice teacher education, and so should be evaluated separately.

Whilst there are many facets of teaching skills that are generic to all subject areas, each area requires skills that are subject specific. As a result, the experiences of classroom music teachers in their first few years of teaching are likely to be different to the experiences of other teachers.

Whoever sings or plays an instrument acquires a second language. The language of music ... crushes walls of solitude, brings people into contact with each other. A person practising music also trains abilities for concentration, empathy and persistence. He [sic] gains a rhythm of life which helps him to develop his own personality ... Through music education and in music schools the foundation for musical culture is laid. (Herzog, cited in Mark, 1998, p. 3)

Arguably, as Herzog implies, the 'language of music' requires certain skills that are in many ways unique. As such, the learning of music needs to be accomplished so that it reflects the distinctive experiences associated with music playing, listening and composing. For this to occur, it is necessary that teachers be taught how to teach music in a way that reflects the distinctive nature of the subject. This article explores the distinctive natures of music education and preservice music teacher education in Queensland, looking specifically at the perceptions that early-career music teachers
hold regarding their preservice preparation. Implications for the evaluation and reconceptualisation of the preservice music teacher education courses in Queensland are discussed.

**The distinctive nature of music education in schools**

It has been widely argued (Hodges, 2000; Reimer, 1989; Swanwick, 1988) that music is a unique subject area. This view gained much momentum through the work of Howard Gardner, who believes that music is a unique form of intelligence. Gardner maintains that music has been shown to be universal, biologically rooted and unique in the skills it employs, and as such it stands separately from all other subjects within the school (Gardner, 1993).

Music education is qualitatively different from other curriculum subjects as it focuses on teaching skills that are unique to the discipline of music. It can be claimed that music education falls within the domains of art, science and pedagogy (Karl-Heinz Ehrenforth, cited in Mark, 1998) and that “the specific tension between science and teaching, which complicates the teacher’s role in general, is deepened in the case of the music teacher by the artistic claims and the multidimensional scientific aspects” (Able-Struth, cited in Mark, 1998).

Despite these views on the unique nature of music and music education, there is an on-going struggle in many schools to justify the presence of music in the curriculum. In schools where the purpose of education is seen to be to prepare students directly for their years of work, music is frequently viewed as subsidiary to most students’ futures, and therefore of little value (Lierse, 1999). In many ways, such perceptions of music determine its role in the school. What follows is a summary of the various aspects of music education that demonstrate its unique place in the school program.

**Aesthetic aspects**

The most commonly held view by music educators is that whilst studies within the arts will provide cognitive, physical and social learning, it is the aesthetic domain of the arts that makes them unique and vital to the human experience. An aesthetic experience is one where “art is related to the experience of life at the deepest levels of life’s significance” (Reimer, 1989, p.52). Music enables people to discover, share, express, and know about aspects of the human experience that we cannot know through any other means. Musical insights into the human condition are uniquely powerful experiences that cannot be replaced by any other form of experience. (Hodges, 2000, p. 54)

To learn the discipline of music, students need teachers who can teach musically, that is, teachers need the ability to provide valuable aesthetic experiences for students (Reimer, 1989). If authentic musical experiences are vital to the experience of being human, then it is essential that music be integrated into every student’s school experience, a point which is emphasised in the Queensland document, *The Arts: Years one to ten syllabus* (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001).
Music education should ensure that students experience music, and enjoy the experience, so that they might engage with it of their own free will, after they have finished formal schooling (Shuler, 2001). However, as musical experiences are highly theoretical and indeterminate by nature, it can be difficult for arts educators to teach in a way that provides a valuable aesthetic experience (Austin & Reinhardt, 1999).

**Utilitarian aspects**

To view music as viable due to the extra-artistic benefits of the musical experience is to take a utilitarian viewpoint. Music has unique utilitarian benefits, which enhance a child’s extra-artistic development. Research shows that engagement with music as a child:

- Optimises brain development;
- Enhances multiple intelligences;
- Facilitates genuine bonding between adult and child;
- Builds social/emotional skills;
- Promotes attention to task and inner speech;
- Develops impulse control and motor development; and
- Communicates creativity and joy (Heyge, cited in Baney, 1999).

Thus, when Queensland students take part in music lessons which require them to aurally and visually identify and respond to music, sing, play, read and write music (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 2001), utilitarians contend that they are learning in a different and unique way that benefits many other aspects of their lives.

Neuromusical research supports the notion that music is a unique mode of knowing, music is dissociated from linguistic or other types of cognitive processes. Therefore, it provides a unique means of processing and understanding a particular kind of nonverbal information. (Hodges, 2000, p. 54)

Knowledge of these extra-musical benefits has led to a number of neurological studies on the impact of music, and the use of music in therapy to influence psychological, physical, emotional and social behaviour.

Advocates of music within schools often refer to its utilitarian benefits to justify its important role within the curriculum (Kelstrom, 1998). In so doing, they risk underplaying the importance of the aesthetic benefits of studying music. This can have the effect of marginalising music’s unique role within the school curriculum. Although music does have extrinsic benefits, arguably this is not the essential reason that people play or listen to it.

**Extra-curricular aspects**

Unlike many other subjects, music education within schools is not limited to the classroom. Classroom music teachers are often expected to take on a large extra-curricular workload. This has been found to cause excess stress, leading to the
phenomenon of early burnout in Australian music teachers (Kelly, 1999). The extra-curricular music program in schools typically includes musicals, concerts, tours and the instrumental program, and often holds a major role in school life.

In Australia, there is often an instrumental music program running alongside the classroom music program. Both programs are different in purpose and method, yet together can provide students with well-rounded musical experiences. Issues that arise from this collaboration are in many ways unique to the secondary classroom music teachers’ experience. Classroom music teachers frequently “conduct music ensemble rehearsals before and after a day of regular class lessons, and during recess breaks on several days in each school week” (Chadwick, 2000, p. 169). Despite this involvement, students, parents and principals frequently view the two programs as separate and unconnected, which can result in more students joining the instrumental program than the classroom program. In fact, when referring to music within the school, principals often do not mention the classroom music program at all. As one principal stated, when referring to the instrumental program, “Music is a selling point for the school” (Lierse, 1999, p. 170).

The administrative burden upon the classroom music teacher of running both an instrumental music program and a classroom music program is great (Chadwick, 2000). Music teachers need to budget and manage the music department almost as though it is a small business. Specialist teachers are hired, fired and managed; instruments are bought, sold and repaired; music is bought, loaned and replaced; musical equipment is bought and managed; concerts are organised (a task which can range from setting up the stage to advertising within the community to conducting a choir, to organising a raffle); tours are organised — the list goes on and on. In fact, Australian music teachers are finding that they cannot meet all of these obligations as well as providing quality learning experiences for their students within the classroom (Chadwick, 2000). A recent study undertaken in Queensland shows teachers’ perceptions of their roles in the school. One experienced Brisbane teacher commented:

Music teachers are often expected to go “above and beyond the call of duty”. Little if any compensation is given to music teachers who are involved in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. Not only are they expected to teach in the classroom (a demanding job in itself), but also involve themselves in the school life through taking choirs and bands. If you have any extra “spares” they are used for internal relief supervisions. The result is burnout – exhaustion, lack of energy, low esteem, poor performance, and lack of job satisfaction ...

Many fine classroom teachers are leaving the profession or are experiencing low job satisfaction because of the demands being placed on the classroom teacher (Kelly, 1999, p. 113).

If experienced music teachers are finding teaching music in schools to be difficult due to the demands placed on them through the extra-curricular program, then this needs to be addressed at a preservice level, to ensure that early-career teachers are well prepared to cope with the multiple demands of their job.
The 'haves' and the 'have nots'

Another striking difference between music and other arts subjects is the distinction between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' (Thomas, 2001). The prevalence of private tuition among young students whose parents can afford it is a major factor in this process of differentiation. Some students will begin private music lessons from the age of four or five, and so by the time they begin classroom music at school, have developed beyond most of their classmates. As a result, classroom music teachers are faced with a range of student abilities that teachers from other subjects are unlikely to encounter.

An Australian study shows the clear link between parental support of their child's involvement in music and musical success (Chadwick, 2000). Whereas in other subject fields (such as science or history), students may never have one-on-one contact with their teachers, private tuition in music appears to be the determinant of long-term musical success and enjoyment. It is very rare to find undergraduate music students who did not have private lessons from a very young age. In contrast, science or history students may never have had to invest in private lessons.

In short, music education is different from other subjects, as it has many characteristics that cannot be replicated. Aesthetically, music is unique in that it provides opportunities for expression through sound. It has utilitarian benefits to students and to the community in the development of cognitive, social and behavioural skills. Within the school, the instrumental music program is frequently the focal point at fundraisers, prize-givings and concerts. Music is viewed as very important by many parents, leading them to send their children to private music lessons from a young age. Due to the distinctive nature of the subject, music teachers require specialist skills to teach effectively. As a result, it is argued that preservice music teacher education should be examined separately from general preservice teacher education.

The nature of preservice music teacher education

A considerable body of research has shown that preservice teacher education has a considerable impact on teachers, and that education students develop their philosophies of teaching and their teaching skills throughout their courses (Carter et al., 1993; Darling-Hammond, 2000a). However, there are also studies showing that traditional teacher education has relatively little impact on classroom practice (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000), and that experiences of education as both an observer and receiver of education (from primary to tertiary education) shape the expectations that preservice teachers have of their future jobs (Gould, 2000; Kennedy, 1999; Teachout, 1997). Indeed, where teacher training has been shown to be ineffective, it can be attributed to the type and design of teacher training being provided (Kennedy, 1999).

The literature suggests that a constructivist approach to teacher education, focussing on participatory learning and reflection, maximises the impact of preservice teacher education on future teachers' practices (Darling-Hammond, 2000a, 2000b; Richardson, 1997). As a result, it is suggested that preservice teacher education needs to provide
student teachers with experiences that form realistic and helpful expectations of their teaching roles once they enter the schools. Such an approach has been shown to have a positive impact on student teachers’ perceptions of their own teaching competencies, leading to increased confidence and also improved teaching within schools (Byo, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2000b). Quality teaching within schools has been linked with high-quality student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000b), which should be the ultimate aim of any preservice education course.

From all the above, it can be argued that appropriate policy changes within the tertiary sector will effect changes within teachers and students from which both may benefit. In order to determine where these changes should occur, it is necessary to answer these questions:

1. How do early career music teachers view the preservice music teacher education programs?
2. How should the programs be balanced between music skills and teaching skills?
3. What is actually occurring in Queensland university courses? and
4. What is occurring in Queensland music classrooms?

**How are early-career music teachers dissatisfied?**

Whilst there have not been any evaluations of the preservice music teacher programs in Queensland, recent Australian studies indicate that Queensland early-career music teachers are the least satisfied with their preservice courses and are those who are most likely to change their careers at an early age (Leong, 1996). Why are they feeling dissatisfied?

It seems that music teachers are finding teaching difficult. They “report that they are unable to fulfil their obligations to provide quality music teaching and learning experiences in an environment where the availability of time and specialist resources has been significantly diminished” (Chadwick, 2000, p. 170). Linked with this is the extra burden of the extra-curricular music program, and the variety of student abilities in music. Music teachers have been found to dislike their job for reasons such as low subject status, lack of purpose in lessons, professional isolation and the absence of peer group support (Hodge, Jupp and Taylor, cited in Spencer, 1996).

Preservice music teachers seem to be consistently unrealistically optimistic about their teaching abilities and their beginning teaching experience until they reach their first year of solo teaching (Richards & Kilten, 1993; Weinstein, 1989). When they reach schools and find that their expectations of teaching are not accurate, music teachers experience what Kundrat describes as praxisschotch (Mark, 1998). Goddard and Foster (2001) found that beginning teachers typically experience concerns with respect to classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students’ work, relationships with parents, the organization of class work, insufficient or inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and dealing with the problems of individual students. As a result, teachers typically blame their preservice preparation for their disillusionment (Goddard & Foster, 2001).
This 'practice shock' is partly the fault of the preservice education program, if as earlier stated, the role of the preservice education program is to prepare students for their working lives. Richards and Killen make a call to address practice shock in the preservice music education courses in Australia, before music teachers leave their preservice courses (Richards & Killen, 1993). Better preparation at university can reduce practice shock and improve the teaching occurring in schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000b).

As a result of the difficulty of teaching music and the experience of practice shock, music teachers maintain that their preservice music teacher education did not prepare them well enough for the realities of teaching, particularly in learning how to teach music (Mark, 1998). This dissatisfaction is strongly linked with the weighting of preservice courses towards the practical and theoretical side of music, and away from the preparation of teaching activity (Mark, 1998). This finding is strongly supported by Australian studies, which indicate that the competencies that early-career teachers most value are those that teach music teaching skills (Leong, 1996). Therefore the existing literature suggests that early-career music teachers are experiencing problems when beginning teaching.

**How should the teacher education programs be balanced between music skills and teaching skills?**

There is a debate over which is more important in general teacher education — to possess skills in the content of the specialist subject, or the method of teaching the specialist subject (Mark, 1998; Reimer, 1993). This provokes the questions — what should be the balance between the development of content and pedagogy skills in music teacher education and how can this 'balance' be best reflected in course programs?

Generally it seems that, although music teachers view music skills as useful to their profession, they value content delivery or teaching skills more. Although music teachers value content delivery and teaching skills, they feel that they have not been adequately prepared in these areas (Hamann, Baker, McAllister, & Bauer, 2000; Mark, 1998).

Music teachers are likely to need only a basic competency in music skills to teach the relevant curriculum. An imbalance in music skills may result in music teachers manipulating the curriculum to marginalise those areas in which they are least confident (Rynne & Lambert, 1997). Similarly, if teachers are not provided with adequate teaching skills in their preservice teacher education courses, they may be less likely to provide varied and relevant learning experiences for their students. It is therefore important that preservice programs provide future music educators with a balanced curriculum, incorporating both theoretical and practical skills in music and teaching (Reimer, 1993; Stegman, 2000).

The professional competencies required of all teachers need to be addressed in preservice teacher education courses so that smooth transition from university to workplace is achieved. Given the specialised nature of teaching music, the need for these competencies is heightened. A strong awareness in beginning teachers of the varied responsibilities of the profession should stand them in good stead in their early years of teaching.
What is occurring in Queensland university courses?

A recent Australian study showed that within preservice music teacher education, the classroom music education units and teaching practice were most valued by music teachers (Chen, 1996). Within the preservice programs these areas of concern were highlighted: *curriculum planning and syllabus requirements, lesson planning and programming, assessment and evaluation, teaching skills/strategies and approaches, and classroom management and discipline* (Chen, 1996, p. 113). Additional skills seen as valuable for inclusion within preservice music teacher education were: *choir/band conducting and band management skills, arranging, orchestrating, composing, broad performance skills, knowledge of a wide range of musical styles and periods* (Chen, 1996, p. 113).

Preservice music teacher education courses at all South East Queensland Universities are integrated into the general Bachelor of Education programs and Bachelor of Music programs. Much of the areas of concern found by Chen (1996) were covered within the curriculum units at Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland. These units run for two full semesters and take up 12% of the graduate student load and 5% of the undergraduate student load. Consequently, the amount of coursework time spent on learning how to apply education principles to practice within a music classroom is generally limited despite studies indicating that music teachers want to be taught specifically how to teach music. Once in schools, most early-career teachers have to independently combine their knowledge of education pedagogy to the teaching of music skills to students (Reimer, 1993; Saunders & Baker, 1991).

What is occurring in Queensland music classrooms?

The premise behind all preservice education courses is that they will improve the quality of teaching and learning occurring in the schools. Therefore, by looking at the state of music education in schools, it is possible to determine, to an extent, the state of the preservice programs in the universities.

The quality of music teaching in schools worldwide is well below that found in other subject areas (Spencer, 1996). An American study found that music teachers were generally viewed as having lower teaching skills than non-music teachers (Hamann et al., 2000). Teacher quality is linked inextricably to the quality of learning occurring in schools. If teachers are not prepared adequately, then their teaching is likely to suffer, and consequently this will affect students’ perceptions of the value of the subject and their quality of learning.

Statistics from the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (2000) and research by Fullarton and Ainley (2000) show that students in Queensland are rejecting music as a secondary school subject in favour of other arts subjects. In 1999 there were 14 449 students studying Senior Art, 12 795 studying Senior Drama, and only 3 911 studying Senior Music in Queensland (Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, 2000). A pilot study by Ballantyne (2000) indicated that this might be due partly to students
rejecting their teachers’ teaching style. Lierse (cited in Chadwick, 2000) maintains that the music programs in Australia are ill-maintained by teachers who have not been effectively trained. In addition, Leong’s Australian study found that “music students did not seem to be gaining much from general music lessons. Only a minority of students had indicated positive gains in the important music skills of performing, creating and arranging” (Leong, 1996, p. 59). These facts suggest that there may be a problem inherent in the current preservice music education.

Discussion and implications

Preparing students to teach classroom music effectively in schools can be a difficult and varied task. Students appear to be rejecting classroom music as a senior secondary subject, which may be a reflection of music teachers’ teaching styles. Preservice music teachers have needs that pertain to the specific nature of teaching music. Consequently, this paper has argued that music teacher education should be considered separately from preservice teacher education. Thus, preservice music teacher education programs in South East Queensland need to address current teacher dissatisfaction with preservice music education courses, the balance of content and method within music education programs, and the application of pedagogical principles to the discipline of music teaching, especially within the philosophical domain of aesthetics.

This paper has highlighted a need to explore the effectiveness of preservice music teacher education programs in Queensland. These coursework paths have never before been considered separately from general preservice education, and it has been argued here that there is significant evidence to suggest that separate consideration of these courses may well highlight ways to improve the current preservice preparation for music teachers. In particular these questions arise from the literature:

1. What are the most important areas to be covered in a preservice music education course and why?
2. How do practicing early-career music teachers regard the effectiveness of their preservice training in preparing them for teaching in schools?
3. How have early-career music teachers’ personal experiences impacted on their perceptions, and what are the implications of this?
4. What is the ideal future of preservice music teacher education?

Endnotes

1. Note: Within this article, when reference is made to ‘preservice music teacher education courses’, the reference is not to one specific degree aimed at producing music teachers, rather, it is to the coursework paths that preservice music teachers take prior to graduating as music teachers.

2. To justify the presence or importance of music within the school based solely on the extra-curricular program reflects a utilitarian view of the place of music within the school.

3. This term refers to teachers in their first three years of teaching.
These studies suggest that students require formal training on how to teach music separately from their practicum experience. Curriculum units and practicum both provide valuable learning experiences, but the areas of greatest concern for music teachers seem to be concentrated within the curriculum units.

A case study conducted in two Metropolitan Brisbane schools showed that one of the main reasons for students rejecting secondary classroom music as a subject is that they feel that music is not useful for their jobs or careers, other subjects are more important, and that music is not useful for getting into university (Ballantyne, 2000). The study also showed that students who choose not to take music do not find the subject’s content interesting. Those students who do not choose music as a senior subject rated their dislike for the teacher and his/her teaching style as an important factor in their choice to reject the subject in their senior years of High School (Ballantyne, 2000).

References


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