

Contemporary Issues in Pedagogy in Music Institutions

Issues of curriculum relevance are driving a raft of reforms and reviews in higher education. The unmet needs of students in terms of employment outcomes, particularly in the area of the performing arts are increasingly a matter of concern. For tertiary music training institutions the need to attach greater importance to student needs has forced a more critical reappraisal of curriculum priorities. An effect of this has been the need to adjust curriculum offerings to produce skilled performers who are also better equipped for a wider range of employment.

It is generally recognised that a large percentage of music graduates will at some stage of their career earn a considerable part of their income in the Music Studio Teaching Profession. Although there are some excellent and outstanding studio teachers, the profession as a whole is still not held in high regard. Bridges (in Comte 1992) argues this is largely because at one end of the spectrum there are those who have come to teaching via performance while at the other end there are those who have had no formal teacher education or performance training. Indeed in Australia it is still possible for anyone to set up an independent private studio practice and gain remuneration without any formal preparation.

In America, this situation has been largely addressed through the introduction of formalised courses in tertiary music institutions. Those in the profession have realised that the inclusion of pedagogy courses in degree programs is not only desirable but an essential element if standards of teaching at all levels are to be improved and be developed (Chronister, 1987). Over the last twenty-five years, the majority of American music tertiary institutions have increasingly implemented pedagogy courses into their degree programs, the result being that most music graduates over the last ten years have had some exposure to some pedagogical training.

It is timely now to ask what music institutions in Australia are doing to raise the standards of their studio music teaching profession? How far have we come in our commitment to providing students with the skills that will assist them to sustain a career in such a profession?

The AMC following survey of music institutions in Australia gives some indication of what is being done to address the above. When asked '*Is Keyboard/Vocal/Instrumental Pedagogy offered as a formalised course in your institution?*' almost three quarters of the respondents supported its inclusion in their degree.¹ In nearly two thirds of these institutions, pedagogy is offered at Undergraduate level, however in a third of those who responded, it is offered at Post-graduate level.² In under half of the institutions pedagogy is offered as an optional course and in slightly less than a third of institutions it is compulsory.³ In summary then, while it is clear that the imperative to raise the standard of teaching through

¹ 71% of 56% who responded in the university sector answered 'Yes'

² 61% of the universities who responded offer pedagogy at undergraduate level. 33% of universities who responded offer pedagogy at postgraduate level

³ 42% of the above universities offer pedagogy as an option. It is compulsory in 29% of the above institutions.

formal tertiary training has been addressed by some music institutions in Australia, there is still more to be done.⁴

For those institutions reluctant to commit to pedagogy courses, the following may prompt a 'rethinking' of their priorities whatever their commitment to other areas of their programs. In response to a recent questionnaire involving keyboard undergraduates and recent graduates in one Australian music institution which asked the question, 'What do music students need to know?' the responses overwhelmingly named the inclusion of pedagogy as being essential to students' training and future employment prospects (Carey, 2004).

Furthermore, as revealed in the responses, most students also see it as essential for music students to have a diverse range of skills in order to prepare them for the many challenges of the teaching profession and in addition for other jobs relating to the music industry.

As all experienced music educators know, it is not possible to 'cover it all' in a degree program. Moreover, the rapidly changing cultural landscape exemplified by the constantly changing job opportunities further highlights the problems of trying to give students all they need to know in this regard. What maybe possible however, is to provide students with the 'learning power' (Claxton, 2002) that will assist them to be sufficiently flexible and equipped to meet the above challenges.

In this context, it is appropriate to reflect upon what it is that we as music teacher educators are doing to assist in helping students acquire this disposition to learning. For example, are we in our pedagogy courses stimulating and inspiring students to learn and to continue their passion for learning by providing a flexible learning environment? Are we fostering broader approaches to independent life long learning and knowledge building? Are we providing students with a portfolio of skills upon which they can subsequently build and use across other areas of the music profession?

The inclusion of pedagogy courses in tertiary institutions does not provide a panacea for all the problems facing the music studio teaching profession today. Neither does it purport to address the complex employment issue for all music graduates. The inclusion of pedagogy focused on learning capacity building can go, however, a long way towards providing the framework for learning which ensures that music graduates are as well equipped as possible to meet employment challenges. For this to occur it is essential to have a form of pedagogy which has at its centre, a laboratory exemplifying and advocating reflective inquiry and new ways of learning.

⁴ It must be noted that Pedagogy is also offered in some TAFE sectors and Private sectors.

References

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