

# Teaching aural analysis in senior secondary music: NSW teacher perspectives and reflections on practice

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## Abstract

This study sought to answer the following question: how is listening being taught in senior secondary music courses in schools across New South Wales (NSW), Australia? In New South Wales, the senior secondary music syllabuses set the expected outcomes for senior secondary students, and list the topics for study from which teachers must select. This affords teachers a degree of freedom regarding the selection of resources and source material. A grounded theory-based multiphase study, which included syllabus and exam paper analysis, was designed to investigate listening pedagogy in senior secondary music teaching. Fourteen teachers were interviewed regarding their approaches, techniques and the resources they used in their classroom, and how they understood and evaluated their students' listening skills. The interviews revealed that these music educators utilised a range of strategies and techniques when teaching analytical listening in the senior secondary music courses. Analysis of the interview data, in conjunction with detailed examination of the music listening literature and the NSW senior secondary Music syllabuses, led to the creation of the 'Systematic-Intuitive Continuum'. This continuum was devised as a means of representing each teacher's description of their pedagogy in relation to the two key influences on the teaching of music listening—the Higher School Certificate Aural written examination, and understandings of how best to develop student musicianship.

**Keywords:** listening, aural analysis, music education, teaching strategies

## Introduction

Listening to music is an activity adolescents engage in both recreationally and in educational contexts. As a practice, it is distinct from simply overhearing music. Listening involves conscious engagement with music, by analysis or elemental 'recognition', in order to deepen one's personal understanding of the structural features of music. In music education contexts, listening, which can also be referred to as aural analysis, is a fundamental component of how music is taught and learned. Pedagogically, "music educators have guidelines about how to listen effectively, to get the most out of the music, and to focus attention for maximum musical impact" (Flowers, 2002). The ability to listen to and understand structural features of music can be developed in isolation or in conjunction with other fundamental musical

experiences, such as performing and composing. Its importance particularly in the New South Wales (NSW) music curriculum means that the teaching approaches and techniques surrounding listening are key elements of music pedagogy.

In NSW, senior secondary music study (Year 11 and 12) can be completed through at least one of three courses: Music 1, Music 2 and Music Extension, for which Music 2 is a pre-requisite. Throughout these courses, students learn about the concepts of music, through the study of a wide variety of musical genres and the key learning experiences of composition, musicology, performance and aural, or listening. This study focused on the way in which teachers of the senior secondary music courses interpreted the syllabus in order to teach music listening. The study was shaped by a grounded theory approach, in that the concepts and analysis

that were developed during the research process were determined by the data collected. A review of the extant literature revealed that much of the research that pertains to music listening linked to analysis was based on studies undertaken outside Australia, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Boal-Palheiros & Hargreaves, 2001; Campbell, 2005; Finnäs, 2001; Johnson, 2011). While this is useful as a basis for comparison, the differences in educational contexts limited its generalisability to the Australian music education context, or more specifically to the NSW Music syllabuses. As such, the broader context of the study, syllabus analysis, interview questions and subsequent qualitative nature of the data collected present a relevant and contextual insight into senior secondary music pedagogy in NSW on the topic of music listening.

## Philosophy and pedagogy of music listening

The research literature regarding music listening provides a general view of the ways music listening is understood in the areas of music philosophy, psychology and musicology, which in turn is predicated upon the 'musical work' concept. In particular, the literature focuses on the implications of listening for classroom music education, where, as has already been noted, listening, often coupled with analysis, is defined as a fundamental music learning experience, together with performance and composition.

How did analytical listening become a cornerstone activity of music education? When did 'the listener' become an identifiable figure? According to Scruton (2009), listening is an activity which is at the heart of all musical cultures, but the act of listening "in motionless silence" is only a recent development, one related to the emergence of Western art music. Scruton explains that at a certain point in European social history, "organised listening" evolved, private and public art music concerts were established, and "the audience fell silent" (2009, p. 8).

The advent of recorded sound meant that music became more widely accessible: "[it] made music something you could collect, and through collecting it, define who you were, even regulate your life" (Cook, 2014). The combination of the increasing accessibility of music, as well as its use as a means of identity-building may have led to its importance in educational contexts. It gave rise to the Music Appreciation movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States and Great Britain, the main aim of which was to educate and improve students and the public through guided listening to the major classical composers, which would then, in turn, "fend off mass culture, and with it, popular music and jazz" (Green, 2008).

There are many theories about the practice of music listening and the intrinsic, extrinsic and interactional factors that can affect the significance of the experience. Listening efficacy can be affected by the social and cultural context of the music, the previous experience of the listener, knowledge about the music itself and even the time of day when the listening occurs (Dunn, 2006). Personal musical preference is also an important factor in determining the way in which a person responds to music (Hallam, 2006). Gender, maturity, socio-economic and cultural status, personality and prior musical training can all shape a person's musical preferences, which can then determine the kind of music listening choices they make.

The cognitive processes involved in the construction of music listening are also of great importance, because if the listener cannot perceive the patterns and relationships in, and organisation of the music, then it is as though they do not exist (Serafine, 1987). Experience in the perception of musical patterns and elements is also fundamental, because "if a listener has no experience in a given musical style, a meaningful musical experience of any work in that style is unlikely" (Reimer & Wright, 1992, p. 239). Therefore, a practical and active approach to music listening should yield the best results in terms of developing knowledge and understanding about music, a point Regelski

(2006) makes regarding the act of ‘musicking’: “Appreciation, then, is not something you know (although knowledge and skill are involved); it is something you do” (p. 298).

How to *do* music listening is the primary concern of most music education literature, and there are a number of examples in the literature of educationists and researchers who have devised particular schemes regarding how analytical listening should be undertaken in primary and secondary education. Campbell’s scheme has three phases in her pedagogy of listening: Attentive Listening, Engaged Listening and Enactive Listening (2005, pp. 31–32). These phases serve as a framework for developing aural skills, with the eventual outcome of enhanced and accurate performance. Green’s (2008) comprehensive, multi-school study on informal music learning practices in the classroom focused on developing purposive listening skills and using listening to enhance performing and composing. Walby (2011) advocated for a sit-and-listen, dialectical approach, where misconceptions are challenged and correct ideas are reinforced.

These schemes could be intended for broad implementation, such as within a curriculum or syllabus (Loane, 1984), or designed for specific means, such as a particular learning stage (Peterson, 2006), musical style (Starr, 1977) or socio-cultural context (Silverman, 2013). They may be based on the understandings of music education at the time (Hartshorn, 1958), or present new ways to approach old material (Gracyk, 2007).

Overall, the key factor in each of these schemes is that active or engaged listening is the ultimate outcome, but each example contains different purposes or contexts. Haack (1969) says that complex music listening skills need to be actively and systematically taught. Undirected listening is not likely to result in the development of specific and complex musical concepts. It is over ‘the how to’ of teaching and utilising directed listening that theorists differ. The context of the learning environment and the abilities and interests of the students (and, indeed, of the teacher) need to be considered when curating an approach to listening.

## The NSW Syllabus and Higher School Certificate

This study was conducted within the context of the senior secondary (Year 11 and Year 12) NSW Higher School Certificate Music courses. At the end of secondary school in New South Wales (NSW), students undertake a final examination process for all of their studies, the Higher School Certificate (HSC). The senior secondary Music courses (Music 1 and Music 2) are run over two years – Preliminary course in Year 11 and the HSC course in Year 12. Music 1 is designed “to meet the needs and interests of students with varying degrees of prior formal and informal learning in music” and has more of a contemporary music focus (Board of Studies, 2009a, p. 6). Music 2 “assumes students have a formal background in music” and “provides students with opportunities to extend their musical knowledge with a focus on Western art music” (Board of Studies, 2009b, pp. 6–7). There is also a Music Extension course, which runs only in Year 12, and is only available to students enrolled in the Music 2 course.

The content and structure of these courses are outlined in the Music 1 and Music 2 syllabuses, as well as the nature of the final HSC Music exams, however the syllabuses do not specify the musical works to be studied. In order to ensure their students achieve the course outcomes, senior secondary music teachers need to have a clear understanding of the requirements of the syllabus. The syllabus expectation is that throughout the Music 1 and Music 2 courses, “students will constantly be involved in the integration of learning experiences in Performance, Composition, Musicology and Aural in both the Preliminary and HSC courses” (Board of Studies, 2009b, p. 20).

Half of the student’s final mark for each subject is obtained from the externally set and marked HSC exams, with the other half of the mark determined by internal assessments throughout the HSC year. Of the external assessments, the largest single allocation of marks is derived from the mandatory HSC Aural Skills written exam. In this exam, students

hear excerpts from works they have not previously studied and answer questions based on the concepts of music. The concepts described in the syllabuses are pitch, duration, structure, texture, timbre and dynamics and expressive techniques (Board of Studies 2009a; Board of Studies 2009b).

## Method

The brief review of literature relevant to listening pedagogy revealed very little research into the pedagogical approaches and strategies actually utilised by classroom music teachers when teaching aural analysis or listening. Therefore, grounded theory was ideally suited to the investigative nature of this issue. It allowed for the formation of hypotheses after the data from the literature, syllabus and interview analysis had been collected, and to identify and understand the similarities and differences in pedagogical approaches based on the views of the participants (Creswell, 2009).

Grounded theory has also been used in other research contexts, as a means of generating new ideas and research in the area of music teacher experience and lesson planning (Niessen, 2008), and as a means to describe and develop tools to

analyse historical musical performances (Mateos-Moreno & Alcaraz-Iborra, 2013). Grounded theory is a useful qualitative research method for areas that lack precedent or where the essential information required lies within the data provided by the participants (Creswell, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are a functional tool for gathering this kind of information, as they “enable respondents to project their own ways of defining the world” and “enable participants to raise and pursue issues and matters that might not have been included in a pre-devised schedule” (Cohen, Manion et al. 2000, pp. 146-147).

## Participants

This study aimed to use a purposeful sample of music teachers who had experience with teaching Stage 6 Music courses (Music 1 and/or Music 2), in order to best address the nature of the investigation. Participants were invited to join the study by means of a mail-out to secondary school music teachers across Sydney and New South Wales. Involvement in the research was voluntary and participants were aware that they could choose to withdraw from the project at any time during the interview process. Ethical approval for the study

**Table 1: The interviewed teachers. The table lists each teacher’s gender, years of experience in teaching music, the music course taught at the time of the interview, the type of school and the teacher’s position.**

	Gender	Years exp.	Course taught	School	Level
JF	F	20	Music 1 and 2	Private, K-12	Head teacher
EB	F	35	Music 1 and 2	Private, K-12	Teacher
MM	M	25	None current; both prior	Public, 7-12	Deputy
JO	M	11	Music 1, IB Music	Private, K-12	Teacher
TT	F	24	Music 2	Ind. Catholic, 7-12	Head teacher
JS	F	3	Music 1	Ind. Catholic, 7-12	Teacher
AD	M	24	Music 2	Ind. Catholic, 7-12	Teacher
NS	F	15	Music 1 and 2, IB Music	Private, K-12	Head teacher
BB	M	25	Music 2	Public, 7-12	Head teacher
PG	M	13	Music 1, IB Music	Private, K-12	Teacher
AA	F	2	Music 1	Catholic Boys, 7-12	Teacher
PT	F	14	Music 1	Public, 11-12	Head teacher
BS	M	8	Music 1	Public, 7-12	Teacher
SS	M	8	Music 1	Public, 7-12	Teacher

was granted by the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee. These interviews were conducted throughout 2013, at various schools around Sydney and regional New South Wales.

Teachers were contacted by way of a letter addressed to head teachers of Music and/or Creative Arts in secondary schools across Sydney and regional New South Wales, inviting them and/or other Stage 6 Music teaching members of their faculty to participate in the study. Dates and times were then organised for the author to conduct the interviews, with the expectation that interviews could last for about half an hour to 45 minutes.

Fourteen teachers were interviewed for the project, seven of whom were female and seven male. At the time of the interviews, five teachers were teaching a Music 1 class, three were teaching a Music 2 class and the remaining six taught a combined Music 1 and Music 2 class, as well as International Baccalaureate Music, Standard and Higher Levels. Four of the teachers were head teachers of Music or Creative Arts. One teacher was a deputy principal.

Of the fourteen participants, four of the teachers had only taught one course (Music 1) so far in their

teaching career. The other ten had all taught the Music 1 and Music 2 courses, and most had also taught the Music Extension course. Most of the teachers were also teaching Stages 4 and 5 (Years 7-10) music classes, and at least one teacher was also teaching Stage 3 (Year 6). A summary of the teaching experience of the participants at the time of interview can be found in Table 1.

## Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured, that is, specific topics and questions were used to frame and focus the interview, but participants were encouraged to expand on answers and ideas in any way they wished. Participants were asked to answer with specific reference to the syllabus learning experience designated 'Aural': however, the researcher also encouraged reference to other learning experiences (Performance, Composition and Musicology), particularly if the participant was describing an integrated approach. This was achieved by use of the word 'listening' instead of 'Aural' by the researcher, as 'listening' could occur in any type of musical activity, whereas 'Aural' implies a more specific, educationally-directed process. The

**Table 2: Interview questions.**

1.	How long have you been teaching senior secondary music?
2.	What senior secondary music classes are you currently teaching?
3.	How many times a week do you see these classes?
4.	Do you have a conceptual or topical approach to your curriculum structure? Or something different?
5.	Do you have specific Listening/Performing/Composing lessons or do you try to incorporate all three practices?
6.	What resources (songs, videos, performances, books) do you use when teaching listening in the classroom? How do you use them?
7.	Can you describe some examples of listening lessons you have taught?
8.	What do you think has been your most engaging method of teaching listening? Why?
9.	How do you accommodate for the variety of abilities and knowledge of the students?
10.	How do you evaluate the students' listening skills?
11.	How have your approaches changed in relation to the teaching of listening?
12.	What inspires your teaching methods? Do you rely on skills developed in your undergraduate study, personal listening experiences, advice/ideas from colleagues?
13.	How important is the role of 'listening' in your music teaching?

list of questions asked of the participants can be found in Table 2.

During the interview the participants were asked to describe and discuss their approaches and techniques for the teaching of aural analysis as well as resources they employed, and to reflect on how their practices might have changed as they gained experience in the field. The interview questions were structured so that the participants could first discuss their teaching practice more broadly, and subsequently make reference to more specific elements. All interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher made brief field notes.

## Coding

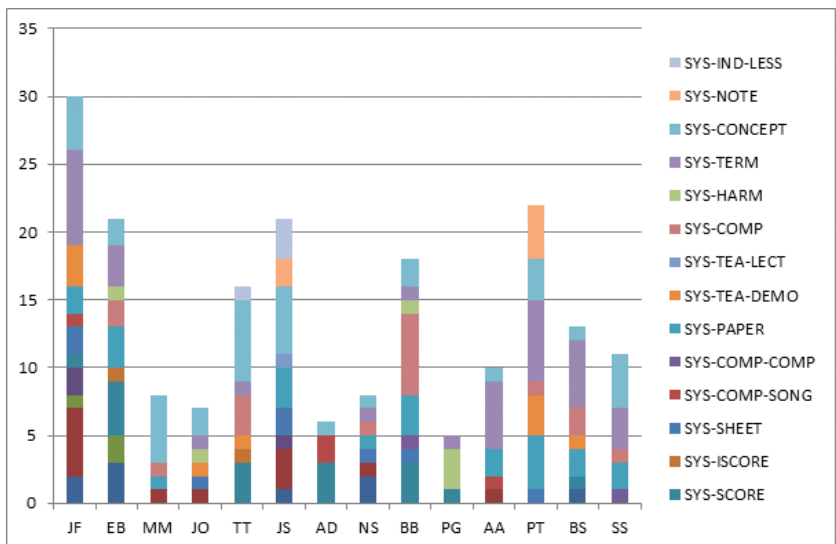
Upon completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and analysed in order to determine recurring themes and to compare and contrast each teacher's experiences and ideas. Analysis of the data collected began with initial coding where overarching themes and recurring ideas were identified. Three broad coding categories primarily centred on the following:

- Teaching approaches and techniques
- Resources
- Teaching experience in the field

During this initial coding process, it became clear that there were certain techniques and resources that teachers frequently referred to as they spoke about the way in which they approached the teaching of listening. This led to the development of a coding system that aligned more with the list of code types described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) or "focused coding" (Charmaz, 2006) that can include those based on setting and context, participant perspectives, activities, strategies and processes.

This secondary coding process led to the creation of a more comprehensive axial coding system, where data from the open coding is sorted, synthesized and organised in new ways (Charmaz, 2006). These codes related more specifically to the approaches and techniques that the teachers used with listening in the classroom. The codes were generated from the data and identified techniques

Figure 1. A graph of the distribution of Systematic codes identified in the interview data for each teacher.



such as using worksheets in listening lessons, focusing on a particular composer, piece, concept or terminology, how textbooks were utilised by teachers, and whether they approached listening in lessons thus designate or integrated the activity with other syllabus learning experiences. After coding of the interviews, graphs were generated to display the distribution and frequency of the various kinds of codes occurring in each interview (see Figures 1 and 2).

From these codes it became evident that broadly speaking, there were two kinds of approaches to the teaching of listening. The first approach seemed to be more dependent upon and committed to the knowledge that the syllabuses and exam structures set out. The second approach seemed more committed to the holistic development of the student musician, and saw the syllabus as a guide and the final HSC exam structure as a step in the educational process, rather than a means to structure lessons around and dictate knowledge acquisition. These two approaches to teaching became clear through the ways participants spoke

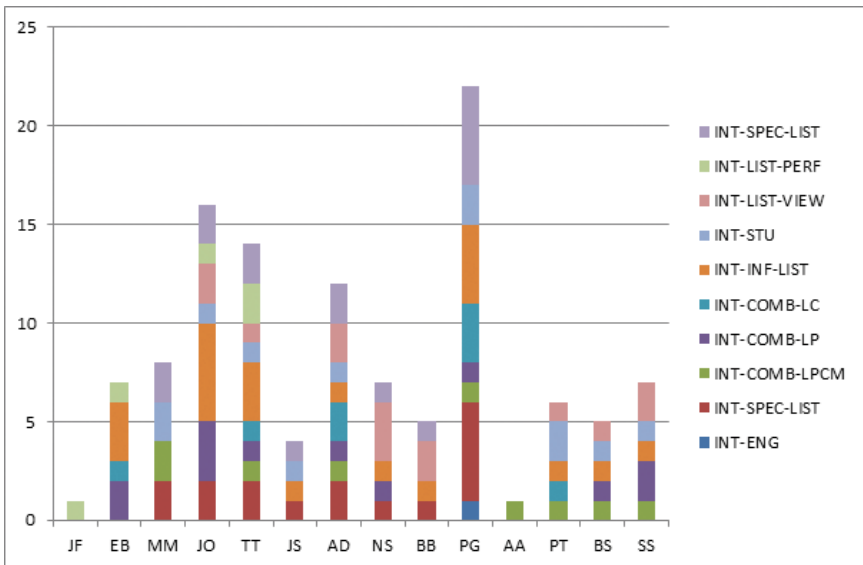
about their resources, their lesson structures, and what knowledge they considered to be important and why.

## Results and Discussion

From the interview analysis, two of the 14 participants were the most starkly different in terms of the ways in which they spoke about their teaching practice and their understanding of music education. These were JF and JO.

JF was a head teacher of Music in a K-12 private school. The first notable difference between JF and the other participants was her primary interest in detailing the different kinds of textbook resources she used for listening with her senior classes. These textbooks appeared to be a critical element of her teaching, informing everything from choice of music to use in class to entire programs, but chiefly she used them to assist her students in their understanding of the six concepts as outlined in the Music syllabuses. Descriptions of her lessons were similarly important to her, and in these she

Figure 2. A graph of the distribution of Intuitive codes identified in the interview data for each teacher.



focused on the concepts, musical terminology and on preparing answers to HSC-style examination questions, with the best lessons being “ones where you have some sort of summary sheet that they can focus on. They have a couple of recordings and a couple of live demonstrations”. At one point, when asked about how her approach to teaching listening had changed throughout her career in education, she said:

I don't know that my approach has changed, I think I've just gotten more confident. My most successful years have been when I've taught everything, for Music 1, from a listening [exam] point of view. So I've gotten really good marks when I've just treated everything from listening. So, ok, we're going to do musicology but we're going to listen to this piece first and you're going to tell me about the duration and then I'll tell you about the piece of music. So if you do everything, if you want really good marks, just teach for the exam. (JF)

JF was a passionate teacher, and her lessons, resources and assessments were directed towards ensuring her students' success in their HSC exam.

JO was a Music teacher, also in a K-12 private school, who taught students from years 7-12. JO's understanding of music teaching and learning was framed in terms that were quite different to that of the other teachers interviewed. He concentrated not on concepts, nor on the HSC, but rather on “trying to expand student's frameworks of vision and frameworks of understanding”. He admitted to having some textbooks detailing the music concepts, but stated that he was “notorious for actually not using [them]”. His method of teaching was, in his word, “haphazard”. He accepted musical and educational possibilities wherever he could find them—from his own record collection, to a Year 7 student excited about the American DJ Skrillex, to music from around the world. His purpose as a teacher was to build musicians and to broaden minds, and ensure his students understood there were many ways to talk about and understand music.

So I tend to present those things as... Here's a helpful framework that you can use, and the

Board of Studies expects you in New South Wales to use these terms, but what they actually mean is... and some people call them elements of music, and some people call them parameters of music and some people don't even give them labels... What people do intuitively and how they communicate intuitively about music is actually not that different to how you communicate formally about music, just using different jargon. (JO)

It was evident from the interview data that these two teachers were very different in the way that they both thought about teaching listening and how they described their approaches to it. Although both teachers were teaching from the same syllabus, JF had found success in using the Aural exam structure and knowledge requirements as a means to designing her lessons, whereas JO's strategy was to focus on musical learning experiences, gleaning conceptual knowledge as students progressed as musicians. The non-prescriptive nature of the senior secondary syllabuses means that both of these pedagogical approaches can successfully exist and enable students to fulfil curriculum requirements and develop musical skills and understanding.

However, it was a third teacher, NS, whose answers during the interview showed that the environment in which a teacher existed can have just as much an impact on how they teach as who they are as an educator. NS was a teacher whose approach to teaching seemed to be at odds with the environment she was teaching in. According to NS, an engaging lesson for her senior secondary students involved working on an exam question and discussing the marking process: “[the students engage] because they want to get a good mark, because at our school the kids are really conscientious, but in my mind that's not engaging”. NS, however, preferred lessons that focused more on learning from meaningful musical experiences. Ideally, you'd have your case study, your icon, and you would study that, you'd analyse it through listening to it, and then you'd play it, and then you'd write a piece that uses some compositional methods that are from the icon in one lesson. I don't tend to say, Monday is playing, Tuesday is



composition, Wednesday... I try and integrate it as much as I can, because I think that's the best way. (NS)

NS also described another listening lesson for which she had created a series of PowerPoint presentations about sound sources, including pictures and audio of familiar and unfamiliar instruments. The music concepts were not mentioned at all. However, after speaking at length about this presentation, she acknowledged that even though this was an example of what she and her students considered an interesting lesson, at her school the students and teaching environment were ultimately geared towards successful HSC exam performance, or, in her words, "the exam game".

I think sometimes I get a bit tired of talking to the kids about how to get good marks, and because I'm under a bit of pressure to get good marks, for a variety of reasons – school political pressure, pressure from the parents, from kids, for your own reputation... I consciously try and pull kids back. Not from getting a good mark, but from being so focused on the marks all the time. Sometimes I just want to play the music. Just shut up and play! (NS)

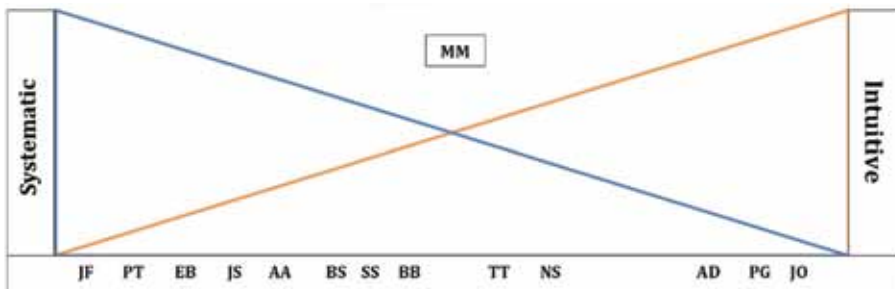
The most engaging listening lessons for her students, were those focused on exam practice and how to gain higher marks. Yet, for NS, her ideal lessons were those that were integrated, combining aspects of listening, performing and

composing while focusing on a major icon or case study. NS appeared to be under a good deal of pressure and seemed worried about whether she should concentrate on the pursuit of her students' examination success or the school's pressure to perform well, or try to find a balance between syllabus requirements and intuitive musical development. She seemed unresolved within herself regarding what she considered successful teaching and learning.

Seeing the similarities and differences between these three participants, as well as analysis of the other participants' interviews, led to the author's creation of the Systematic-Intuitive continuum (Figure 3). The placement of each of the participants on the continuum was based on the frequency and distribution of the Systematic or Intuitive codes throughout their interview data, alongside consideration of the context of what they said.

For example, NS spoke frequently about utilising Systematic style teaching, but when considered in the context of what she was saying, it was clear that she taught in this way not because it was how she really wanted to teach, but because the school environment and the students were so heavily geared towards a Systematic approach that it was as if she had no choice. So even though her teaching could be said to be more Systematic than Intuitive,

Figure 3: The Systematic-Intuitive continuum. Teachers were positioned on the continuum according to the frequency and distribution of the Systematic (commitment to the syllabus and utilisation of the HSC Aural exam as a means to scaffold the teaching of listening) or Intuitive (commitment to teaching holistically, using the syllabus and the HSC Aural exam as an extrinsic goal to support intrinsic learning) codes throughout their interview data. MM (in the box) was a deputy principal and had not been allocated a senior class in the year of the interview, instead reflecting on his senior teaching experience in previous years.



the way she described how she would teach in an ideal situation met the criteria for the Intuitive side.

It is designated a continuum in order to make the point that none of the teachers interviewed exhibited only characteristics of one or the other approaches. The continuum was constructed as a means of depicting some of the key differences and similarities regarding how the participants approached the teaching of music listening. It also represents how much influence the Aural written exam structure and content can have on the way in which music educators teach the aural component of the senior Music courses. The continuum also has a theoretical basis in goal orientation theory, particularly utilising the two main goals of performance (exam success) and mastery (learning), as initially postulated by Dweck (1986), further clarified in Dweck (2000) and comprehensively measured in Midgley et al. (1998). Performance focused goals relate to a specific external outcome such as an exam or formal assessment, and success is determined by a person's ability to achieve at a higher level than others. Mastery focused goals relate to increasing personal competence in a particular field and these goals are not necessarily fixed, as there is always more to learn and accomplish. A mastery learner is intrinsically motivated and her success is not affected by the achievements of those around her.

For several of the teachers in the Systematic part of the continuum, the structure and content of the HSC Aural written exam very clearly shaped how they taught listening in their senior secondary classrooms. The concepts of music also featured heavily in their discussion of teaching techniques, as did the use of past HSC papers as a study and classroom resource. Generally speaking, teachers who seemed to be committed to a more Systematic style of teaching described listening lessons where the act of listening would often be paired with writing or reading activities, or discussion-based analysis. Listening in the classroom was often a stand-alone activity or lesson and not necessarily part of an integrated series of activities involving composition or performance.

The language of the concepts was also a key factor, with some teachers describing the various ways in which they would try to teach their students about the words they need to use when describing what they could hear. For JF, textbooks were her main go-to, and before the interview had properly started JF had already described several of her favourite textbooks that she would frequently refer to in class or use to structure a lesson. PT had actually gone to the trouble of creating entire booklets for each separate concept and even translated them for the international students in her classes, as well as devoting specific walls in her room to concept language and definitions:

There's zones around the room. So if, say, we're doing pitch, I'll say, "Ok kids, pitch, let's all look at the pitch wall. Let's refresh ourselves, what are all these things for pitch?" (PT)

AA also described how her students became more successful at answering certain exam questions when she went to the trouble of scaffolding specific phrases for them to use in order to help clarify the meaning of their answers:

The one [question] that they performed well above state average on was the one where I had actually specifically taught them that they need to use the phrase "This creates unity" or "Unity is created by..." What's amazing is that I've gone to the effort of teaching them that at the beginning and the end of their sentences, but it has no impact on what they know in terms of what they can recognise [aurally]. (AA)

This commitment to the exam structure and conceptual language was clearly a key way in which senior secondary Music educators interpreted the reality of the HSC Music courses. In NSW, at the end of Year 12, the aural and musicological skills of their students are tested by a written exam structured in a specific way, and examinations of a similar structure may well be used by the teachers as part of their internal assessment throughout the course, so why not base the way they teach listening and aural skills on this structure, especially if even the students themselves are asking for it?

However, not all teachers seemed to be so committed to this exam-focused approach. The educators placed on the Intuitive side of the

continuum spoke very differently about how they approached the teaching of listening. Instead of the HSC Aural exam forming the foundation of their teaching approaches, it was more of a goal for their students to aim for during their musical development. Conceptual language was still an important part of teaching. One teacher (TT) said, “You cannot do it [teach listening] without studying the concepts, you just can’t get away with it”, but rather than having lessons and activities rigidly defined by which musical concept they needed to learn, knowledge of the concepts grew from the musical experience. Listening also seemed to be much more integrated with the other syllabus learning experiences of composition and performance. TT talked about teaching integratively as if it was the most logical way to teach:

I always make them aware when we’re listening, when you come to compose, this is the technique that you need to incorporate into your [composition]. So I interrelate mine a lot, or I try as hard as I can to interrelate them. (TT)

The nature of PG’s position at his school meant that he would use listening specifically as a means of enhancing the compositional skills of his students, by exposing them to different sounds, different genres or technical musical elements that could affect or improve their theoretical understanding of music. AD described a lesson that he would use for classes from Year 7 to Year 12 where he would combine composing, performing and listening for the purpose of developing the creative, improvisational and ensemble performance skills of his students.

There’s a lesson that I do with all years, where I get them to make five compositions. Composition one, I’ll say go and make whatever noise you like, then I say stop. We practice that a couple of times. That’s composition one. What do you think we can do to make the piece better? We go through and we do about five compositions. That way they’re listening, they’re listening to each other, one of the exercises is they have to have a conversation with another sound around the room, so they’re engaging... by the end, you don’t tell them when the piece stops. You allow it to stop when it’s ready to stop. (AD)

Essentially, what framed the way these educators taught listening was not the final exam but the musical experience itself. From this musical experience their students could then learn what they would need to know for their final exams, but more importantly, what could enable them to become better musicians and musical learners.

Although the two halves of the continuum are described in this way, the interview data shows that the overall strategies described by the teachers were exclusively one side or the other. For a teacher to be exclusively systematic in their approach it would mean they see no educational benefit in the musical experience, which many would regard as being a terribly ineffective music teacher. On the other hand, for a teacher to be exclusively Intuitive, it would mean completely ignoring the significance of the HSC final exams, which could be perceived as being educationally irresponsible.

## Conclusions, Limitations and Implications

The study sought to fill a gap in music education literature relating to current classroom practices in Australia, by identifying how listening is taught by music educators in New South Wales. The study’s conclusions are constrained by its small sample: nevertheless, the range of teaching experience as well as varying teaching environments and perspectives means that the findings have the potential for wider application and that they have the potential to contribute to future, larger studies of the topic. The study is also limited in that the results are confined to participant interview data. Further theoretical conclusions could have been formulated from classroom observations, but this would have proved more difficult to clear, both practically and ethically, in that it would have involved observing senior students at their most critical time of study. Recent research involving senior secondary students in NSW has also encountered significant limitations in utilising students for research (North, 2015, p. 125).

The findings reveal that the teachers interviewed

employ a range of teaching approaches, techniques, resources and repertoire. This range is apparent despite the fact that all of the teachers are constrained by identical syllabus requirements. The range of pedagogical approaches may well be due to the non-prescriptive nature of the syllabus, which makes statements on *what* is to be taught but not on *how* content should be taught. The key factors that influenced the ways the participants described how they taught listening in the senior secondary classroom included: the student cohort; the HSC Aural Skills exam structure and syllabus requirements; and the overall teaching environment—which could include the physical classroom and school context, as well as teachers' musical preferences and perceptions. These findings are consistent with the nature of the literature regarding music listening pedagogies. The research provides many examples of approaches and techniques that can be utilised to teach listening in the music classroom, with their efficacy dependent upon the suitability and balance of the previously described influences. Based on the range of approaches described by the interviewees, it is recommended that teachers of listening and aural analysis read widely about music listening pedagogy, and utilise strategies and techniques that best suit their practical and philosophical teaching environments.

Concerning further research, it may be worthwhile to see whether the guidelines or descriptors supporting the Systematic-Intuitive continuum could be applied fruitfully to other music teachers, and the extent to which a teacher's systematic or intuitive approach significantly impacts the way in which students learn, or even the way in which they perceive music as a choice for formal classroom study. It could also be worth investigating the influence student literacy levels can have on how music teachers approach listening, due to the importance of learning correct terminology and vocabulary for written exams and assessments. Tertiary music educators are encouraged to develop in their students the ability to design and modify

listening lessons and activities that can ably serve the knowledge, learning and practical needs of students in their future classrooms. Understanding and analysing the nature of contemporary music education practice will benefit both the educators in the field and the students who learn from them.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my thesis supervisor, Dr Michael Webb, for his work, support and guidance.

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