

# Music teaching and learning in a regional conservatorium, NSW, Australia

Christopher Klopper, Bianca Power

Griffith University

## Abstract

This study documents and analyses the environment where music education happens in a regional Conservatorium in New South Wales, Australia. The study aimed to gain insight into the structure, nature and professional practice of a regional conservatorium, and identify innovative pedagogical possibilities. An ethnographic case study was undertaken over one year, with intensity ranging from weeklong immersion schedules to occasional short-term observation of activities. Schwab's (1969) commonplaces of schooling (milieu, subject matter, students and teachers) were applied as a priori themes, providing a scaffold for preliminary classification and exploration of the data. Empirical themes were identified as they emerged through data analysis, and subsequently applied. A dominant finding of the study is the areas of intersection between the commonplaces of schooling: the triangulation of expertise (teacher, performer and musician); a curriculum design that is student centred; mechanisms to enhance the sustainability of a regional Conservatorium; adaptation of pre-established curricula; students need to be prepared for a musical life beyond the Conservatorium; and parental involvement is central for success.

**Key words:** Regional conservatorium, professional practice, teaching-learning music, commonplaces of schooling, ethnographic case study.

*Australian Journal of Music Education* 2012:1, 80-91

## Introduction

Regional Conservatoriums of Music New South Wales (NSW), Australia are unique in that they are not associated with a tertiary institution and receive part funding from the State Government of NSW Department of Education and Training. No other Australian state or territory funds or part-funds non-tertiary conservatoriums located in regional areas. NSW Regional Conservatoriums are most often the principal provider of music education services for their region servicing schools, individuals, and the wider community through specialist instrumental and vocal training with emphasis on school-aged students and curriculum support for schools. Since their establishment in the late 1970s a network of

conservatoriums providing extensive music education services to almost 20,000 students in NSW regional communities has developed. In most cases, regional conservatoriums are teaching across wide geographical areas requiring specialist teachers to travel vast distances in order to provide students in outlying communities, villages and cities with access to them. The majority of these outreach programs are working exclusively with NSW Public Schools. Klopper (2009) highlighted the fundamental aim of regional conservatoriums as: 'attempting to provide equity for students in remote areas having the same access to music education opportunities, as do their city counterparts' (p. 36).

While much research has been conducted in music classrooms and on instructional settings within public schools, comparatively little systematic inquiry has been directed towards private teaching studios, especially those outside the auspices of tertiary institutions. Music teaching and learning in these contexts remains largely outside the realm of curricular review or pedagogical scrutiny (Montemayor, 2008). Bridges (1988, p. 49) stated that music studio teaching was the 'backbone' of Australian music education, acknowledging that 'many children and older students owe their personal musical development primarily to studio teachers who give individual lessons'. Further to this, Breen and Hogg (1999, p. 49) made the comment that 'the private instrumental music teacher carries a great responsibility for the music education of children'. The private music studio environment is a neglected area of research in music education (Lierse, 2007a), yet it is fundamental to music education in the Australian culture. Despite these continued efforts by those teaching in regional conservatoriums, there has been little systematic documentation of the institutional values, expectations and standards inherent in the professional practice or pedagogic activities of music educators in these settings.

The existing literature on instrumental music education has been mostly concerned with tuition undertaken within a school context rather than from within a regional conservatorium of music. Some time ago Clinch (1983) discussed instrumental tuition in Australian schools, stating that teachers implementing these programs are often not adequately trained or prepared to do so – untrained in the relevant musical skills and/or educational objectives. Clinch (1983) continues that the majority of those said to be "qualified instrumental teachers" were trained by institutions whose main objective was to train them to be musicians, not teachers, asserting that an instrumental teacher needs all the skills of a classroom teacher as well as the knowledge and

skills of an instrumentalist. Investigating studio teaching in tertiary institutions, Zhukov (2004) concluded 'research into individual instrumental teaching is still in its infancy, there is urgent need for further investigation in this area' (p. 6), hence the importance of this investigation of where music teaching and learning happens in a regional conservatorium in New South Wales, Australia.

Lierse (2007b) investigated the ways in which the private music studio context can become a 'micro musical community'. Both Lierse (2007b) and McPhee (2012) discuss the often solitary nature of studio teaching with limited opportunities for collegial discussion and collaboration. Lierse states that while the studio setting is often not perceived as a community due to instrumental teachers most often working on a one-to-one basis, the way in which the studio is managed can provide a sense of belonging, and of community, to its members. Lierse explains that the private studio community comprises individuals who have a common theme – that of learning a musical instrument. Research has identified the key factors of peer influence and peer interaction as beneficial to learning within the sense of 'community' in the music studio, particularly among adolescent students (Barr, 2007; Keeler, 2011; Lierse, 2007b; Thompson 1983; Montemayor, 2008).

Hallam (1998) asserts that the student-teacher relationship is crucial in determining the level of expertise a pupil is able to acquire. Lierse (2007b) discusses the teacher-student relationship in the private music studio, and the manner in which this relationship changes as students move through the stages of learning, and from childhood to adulthood. Lierse identifies this student-teacher relationship as an important factor in the student's technical, musical, social, and emotional development. Mitchell (2012) considers the crucial importance of supportive student-teacher and student-parent relationships in relation to student participation in music competitions and exams. Montemayor (2008) also cites literature advocating the importance of student-teacher

relationships in instrumental tuition and how this must adapt to meet students' changing needs throughout and across the stages of their learning (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathmunde & Whalen, 1993; Davidson, Moore, Sloboda & Howe, 1998; Pitts, Davidson & McPherson, 2000). Ford (2009) advocates the advantages for both teachers and students of the teacher being both a teacher *and* a performer, and the enhanced student-teacher relationship that this promotes. Keeler (2011) advocates for the incorporation of ensemble playing into the private studio context as a way of better preparing students for the real world context as musicians. Mahamuti (2009) also asserts the benefits of students making music together in groups to include development of a "network" and enhancement of future collaborative performance abilities. In addition to this, Creech and Hallam (2009) assert that parent-teacher relationships have the potential to enhance outcomes for students, teachers, and parents also.

This study aimed to document and analyse the environment where music education happens in a regional conservatorium in New South Wales, Australia. It presents connections between the Conservatorium's curriculum, the pedagogical approaches and the learning outcomes that are relevant to securing an assured future generation of musicians and cultural custodians in regional Australia. As Carey, Draper, Lebler and McWilliam (2006, p. 1) describe: 'Getting the mix of learning and unlearning right will be more important for new generations than merely sticking to time-honoured habits that mark a stable social world'. The implication is not for regional conservatoriums to abandon current teaching techniques or approaches but rather reconnoitre innovative pedagogical possibilities that anticipate the teaching and learning that is occurring, allowing for adjustments to be made to pedagogical work with and for, rather than on, young people.

## Method

The numerous components of the regional conservatoriums do not lend themselves to a tidy listing. To aid this 'listing' and provide a framework to present and interrogate the data, Schwab's (1969) four commonplaces of schooling were utilised. Schwab described the practical application of curriculum as dealing with four commonplaces: students; teachers; subject matter; and milieu (Schwab, 1969). These commonplaces were designed as criteria for assessing the state of curriculum, and determining changes to be proposed (Hewitt, 2006). Schwab's commonplaces of schooling have served as a model for discourse about curriculum since first presented in Schwab's work in the late 1960s (Pinar, 1995). The four commonplaces of schooling constitute the basic components that exist in any educational encounter. According to Schwab, at any given moment any aspect of curriculum includes aspects of all four commonplaces – some more evident in a given moment than others. Each commonplace is as important as any other, and none can exist independently of the others (Schwab, 1969). It is impossible to fully discuss a curriculum model without referring to all four of Schwab's commonplaces (Pinar, 1995).

Schwab's four commonplaces are reasonably self-explanatory: 'Students' refers to issues related to those for whom the curriculum is tailored; 'Teachers' are those responsible for implementing the curriculum; 'Subject matter' refers to that which is taught; and 'Milieu' is the setting or environment in which the curriculum takes place.

These interrelated commonplaces were used throughout this study to frame the organisation of the research, both informing data collection and later providing a scaffold for preliminary classification and exploration of the data. Empirical (inductive) themes were also identified as they emerged through data analysis, and subsequently applied.

This ethnographic case study relied heavily on fieldwork, with intensity ranging from weeklong immersion schedules to occasional short-term observation of activities. Purposive sampling was utilised to allow for information-rich cases based on a combination of homogeneity and heterogeneity criteria characteristic of a regional conservatorium. The researcher aimed to observe all services offered by the regional conservatorium, following these observations with participant interviews to further corroborate data. Activities observed included but were not limited to: ensemble rehearsals, performances, musicianship classes, theory classes, administrative procedures and the day-to-day activities of a regional conservatorium. Semi-structured interviews were held with the Executive Director [n=1], and teaching and non-teaching staff [n=5]. For the purpose of informal interviews with students [n=20] and informal interviews with parents/carers [n=5] convenience sampling was employed that is, participants were those willing and able to participate.

The design of data collection instruments and procedures being based around Schwab's (1969) four commonplaces of schooling (identified as organisers for this research), allowed the multifaceted interrelationship of the various components of the regional conservatorium to be analysed as a complex interactive system – a system in which an event in one component can have significant ramifications for one or more other components.

## Observations

Structured observations took place during the scheduled activities of the Conservatorium, with the researcher endeavouring to have as minimal an impact on the naturalistic setting as possible (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The approach of the researchers was to observe activities from an out-of-the-way spot that was close enough in proximity to see, hear and make accurate notes (Emerson, Frez & Shaw,

1995). This was in a manner similar to that used by Montemayor (2008), rather than seeking an active role as participant observer (Bryman, 2008). As was anticipated, several instances occurred in which staff suggested actions which they saw as appropriate for the researcher to take part in, such as tuning and setting up ensemble scores. Such involvement, whilst not directly sought by the researcher, offered an opportunity to contribute in a practical, hands-on way to the activities of the Conservatorium, also providing opportunities to observe relevant activities in greater detail more aligned to participant observation (for examples of similar efforts see Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Goodrich, 2007; Jaffurs, 2004).

## Informal interviewing

Informal interviews are neither pre-planned nor audio recorded, but rather take place as part of casual conversation with participants. Discussions or fragments of discussion of particular relevance to the research were recorded as hand-written field notes and/or audio-recorded field notes, later transcribed and de-identified. This kind of conversational exchange allowed the research to be guided to an extent by the interests of participants, and enabled the researcher to ask clarifying questions as would normally be the case when using semi- or unstructured, open-ended interviewing techniques. The informal interviews involved asking questions about activities relating to the practice of the conservatorium, potential demand, sustainability, staff response to the impact of services offered to the community and the general interest and engagement in the life of the Conservatorium. No one was asked to provide information of a sensitive nature, nor about aspects of their work that did not relate to the interests and purpose of the research.

## Semi-structured interviewing

This technique was used to collect qualitative data from the Conservatorium executive director

and staff allowing the respondents the time and scope to talk about their opinions on the research foci. Questions did not always follow the exact outline in the interview schedule as the researcher needed to ask questions not included in the schedule to ensure understanding and to pick up on things volunteered by the interviewee. The objective was to understand the respondent's point of view rather than make generalisations about their reported behaviour. Collecting data through more than one method or source secures triangulation of data. In this study triangulation of data was employed through the crosschecking of interview data against participant observations.

## Results and discussion

Consistent with the use of Schwab's four commonplaces of schooling as a framework for this research, presentation of the results and discussion is organised around these commonplaces (milieu, subject matter, students, and teachers). The analysis of data provided insight into the structure, nature and professional practice of regional conservatoriums, and the ways in which music training is recruiting and responding to students from regional communities; and identified the challenges that face regional conservatoriums.

### Milieu

Milieu refers to the context or setting in which the regional conservatorium exists. The components that have been categorised (through the process of thematic analysis) as relating to milieu range from broad-reaching movements in education to demographic and social issues; these influence both the discussion about, and professional practices of, regional conservatorium.

### Governance, Management, Finance and Partnerships

The NSW Government views education as one of the keys to delivering social justice and equality

of opportunity, and is committed to a future where all NSW residents have equal access to the best education available and where no one is left behind (Gadiel, 2009). The Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums represents the collective interests of the network of NSW regional conservatorium originally developed as branches of the NSW State Conservatorium of Music with administration vested in a Board of Governors. In 1973 the administrative structure of the Conservatorium underwent reorganisation, and in 1974 responsibility for the distribution of state government grants to regional conservatoriums transferred to the then Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs. Since 1997 the Department of Education and Training has administered the Regional Conservatorium Grants Program providing annual funding to 15 autonomous conservatoriums and two small music centres in non-metropolitan NSW. This funding is made available to support quality music education, training and performances that are accessible and responsive to community needs in rural and regional NSW. Tuition fees and community sponsorships for various programs augment annual funding – the most popular use of these funds being the scholarship program. Generous amounts of money from individuals, business and service clubs provide for scholarship and fee relief. At the Conservatorium 30 of the 700 enrolments receive varying levels of scholarship and fee help.

The conservatorium is located in the West Wing of the Court House. The Court House is a grand architectural work built of sandstone and is strategically central and commanding in this regional city of NSW. There appeared to be a great sense of industry about the conservatorium, which on closer examination revealed the happenings to be that of the Court House and not the West Wing where the conservatorium is located. Attendance at the conservatorium is with purpose. That is to receive tuition. People attend to gain a service for which they pay, and it appears that this dominates

and overrides the sense of relationship and community. It was later learned that there is no central place to congregate, to connect and this contributes to the perceived lack of relationship and community. *"There's also no room to loiter here. You know, the foyer... you see how big that is! You're lucky to get two people in there"* (Interviewee).

Having spent numerous days and hours immersed in this community it was reminiscent of a doctors' surgery. There is an overall practice with individual practitioners utilising the facilities. Their patients (students) come, present symptoms (rehearse), receive diagnosis (commentary) and are presented with a script (invoice). The General Practitioner, or in this case the Music Teacher, does not take responsibility for the administration of the practice. The administration office collects the fees and administers payments to the teachers.

Due to the large number of teaching staff teaching at various times during the day and week, and in a range of available venues within the West Wing, there is little opportunity for all staff to be together. This was particularly noticeable while sitting in the staff common room. When asking the teachers if: *"there's no formal mechanisms at this institution to allow for collaboration and sharing of ideas between staff?"* the repeated response was *"Not that I'm involved in, not that I know of"*. One of the teachers commented: *"Well, I suppose we have to communicate with the administration staff here, even if it's only, you know, once a fortnight to get paid"* (Teacher), highlighting a surgery transactional mind-set and not one necessarily of relational.

## Opportunities for music instruction and related activities

In the Strategic Plan 2006-2009 the conservatorium asserts to provide students with: *"professional music teachers, early childhood music learning and enjoyment, other school age and adult music learning and enjoyment and lifetime opportunities for music development"*

(p. 2). On an information pamphlet (2009) the following activities are listed: individual tuition, group tuition (various ensembles have been listed), early childhood music, music therapy, Alexander Technique and instrument hire. The lack of easily accessible information about what the conservatorium actually offered might very well be the contributing factor to: *"lack of attendance, and the lack of community interest that comes in"* (Interviewee). Another interviewee suggested: *"there definitely has been a few comments that the conservatorium has almost an elitist feel. You know, they're classical, very proud, very upright, floating about!"* This notion of elitism is furthered by *"the students appear to come from a range of schools, however, it's observed that many are from private schools that identify through the uniforms they are wearing"* (Interviewee). Does this practice support the notion that private music tuition remains an elitist activity? When discussing this with the administrative staff that govern the fee payments it was indicated that private music tuition was by no means an elitist activity. Many of the students did not attend private schools, but attended public schools. These children have parents who see the value and worth in music tuition and make sacrifice to offer their children the opportunity to participate. It would not be a fair assessment to suggest that the activities of the conservatorium were elitist or privileging wealthy *"while music is a bit of a luxury for a lot of people, the conservatorium has a number that aren't from the top end of the market, but rather two income families"* (Administrative staff).

The conservatorium offers a service to regional, rural and remote NSW schools that may not otherwise have access to music education through supporting music specialists to travel to the schools. This program is primarily music focussed but affords the freedom to tailor make the program to what the schools want, whether they want the dance, movement, or a bit of drama thrown in there as well. Barr (2007) reinforces the

importance of a sense of community for students in aiding student retention, as well as the teacher-student relationship. This is an illustration of the conservatorium going to the community as opposed to the observation of the community coming in. It propels the view of a sense of “community” organically growing.

## Parents

During interviews with the teachers from the conservatorium the importance of a triad relationship (teacher/student/parent) became apparent. A teacher commented: *“I try to keep in touch with parents and I find that parents seem to have more interest in finding out how things are going with tuition here at the Conservatorium. I experience this interest more here than in the private school where I teach”* (Teacher). The rapport between teacher, student and parent is highlighted: *“I think that that’s extremely important that there’s a rapport not just the teacher and the student but with the parent because the parent needs to know and see the value in what their child is getting”* (Teacher). Parent involvement is seen to be reinforcing their children’s music learning. A few of the teachers encouraged parents’ active involvement in their children’s music. The guitar teacher in particular encourages the parent to bring a guitar along so they can learn together. The relationship is concretized. The value of what they’re doing has automatically changed, as the parent and student are now side-by-side in a teaching and learning environment. While observing the guitar teacher interacting with a student and parent this side-by-side learning was evident as they learn the two or three chords in a very simple song, and just being able to strum them – the parent barely even knowing how to play the instrument, is able to strum the chords on the beat and accompany their child (student) playing. Suddenly the child isn’t just practicing a melody in isolation, and getting lost or overwhelmed, but instantly becomes part of a musical interaction. This musical interaction is

between a parent and a child and the teacher – a triad relationship. Reflecting on this transaction the teacher comments: *“it’s a ... a pleasant social event and it helps to facilitate the situation”* (Teacher). However, not all teachers regard this triad relationship to be a pleasant social transaction but rather view it as an invasion of professional autonomy, *“That’s right, yeah, like I need to be inspected while I’m doing it, and I really don’t like that very much at all”* (Teacher).

*“I had nothing to do with music growing up, so I virtually have nothing to compare it with”* a parent told me. This supports the theme that emerged from the interviews with the teachers that there is a need to influence parents of the value of what the conservatorium has to offer – *“we have to make people realise that what we have to offer is actually relevant and that it can lead on to other areas. It’s just one step”* (Teacher) in the education of student and parent – positive parent reinforcement through positive relationships.

## Subject matter

Subject matter constitutes the movements and ideas that focus on what is taught and learned in the regional conservatorium.

## Standards

Currently there are no set standards, syllabus or curriculum followed. Pre-established curricula such as Australian Music Education Board (AMEB), Trinity College London, Royal School of Church Music Kodaly, Suzuki and NSW Creative Arts syllabus (2006) are currently used. This places responsibility firmly on the teacher to establish, design and develop a curriculum based on his/her own knowledge and experiences, in doing so providing opportunity for these curricula to be adapted to meet the needs of the teacher and student. *“I also enjoy the fact that you haven’t got a strict syllabus. So you can think of the pupil. Think of what motivates them and then choose something suitable”* (Teacher). This follows a child-

centred approach, but also has the potential to perpetuate a cycle of teaching the way that you were taught. The suggestion here is not that all past teaching experiences are problematic, but simply that this could contribute to static teaching approaches that are not reflective of current trends and methods thereby not engaging innovative pedagogical possibilities that anticipate the purpose of teaching and learning music which connects young people.

## Core knowledge

Teachers spoke of the need to expose children to a variety of approaches in music and not be limited to one established approach, genre or style. It became clear that for most of the teaching staff the greater the variety the better the exposure. They also shared passionately about encouraging a love for music of quality and to broaden horizons where more than the classical genre could be considered as quality music. The genre was not important but the quality was the discerning feature. This however was not the sentiment of some long standing teachers who felt the classical genre needed to be retained in the teaching and learning process *"I'm of the older generation and I think it'd be a crying shame to lose classical because I think it's the basis for everything"* (Teacher).

A significant theme was the perceived need to prepare students for a life beyond the conservatorium. Teachers spoke about *"trying to encourage people to play music for life, to keep playing"* (Teacher). Not just as a performer but for life: *"If you can cooperate during a piece of music you've probably got a good chance of being able to cooperate in other situations as well"* (Teacher).

## Assessment

Formal assessment is only offered if a student elects to participate in grading systems (AMEB, Trinity College London, RSCM): *"I'm running along the lines of that grade system, so I know where*

*they're up to as far as ability wise goes"* (Teacher).

The conservatorium requires all teachers to provide a progress report to parents half yearly. There is no template for this report and it is up to the teacher to offer an assessment of the student's progress. When discussing the effectiveness of this reporting to parents a teacher commented: *"I think the reports are somewhat superfluous if you had a lot to do with the parents, but you still have to do the, the formality of it and all this kind of thing"*.

## Students

In considering Schwab's third commonplace of schooling – students – trends and issues are related to those for whom the regional conservatorium exists.

## Recruitment of students

Two main modes of recruitment occur – active recruitment and positive peer pressure. Due to the conservatorium not having a high profile in the community recruitment is regarded as difficult. Not only is it challenging to find a medium that connects with all potential students, but also the same difficulty is experienced when advertising concerts that in turn would profile the organisation. A current strong mode of recruitment is the in-school-testing program which is an aptitude test followed by an instrumental suitability test. This is in response to what the schools are telling the conservatorium. The format has changed over time to be much more a demonstration presentation followed by instrumental try out. But the outcome is hoped to be the same, which is that students will go home and say, *"Mummy, Mummy, I want to learn the flute,"* and *"Mummy, send the form back in."* The conservatorium is fortunate that the schools are almost in competition with one another to develop a really strong music education program. There's been a little bit of competitiveness witnessed between school bands; and certainly school bands have been seen as a great asset

to perform at prize-giving ceremonies and Christmas concerts, and the school fete.

## Student expectations and engagement

Student expectations centred the belief of students considering their teacher as a person, a performer and as a musician. Students valued seeing their teacher as a performer and being able to perform alongside during various performance opportunities. Students also expressed the importance of 'keeping it fun' during lessons. One student commented that: *"music intrinsically is for enjoyment anyway"*. Being mindful of this requires the teacher to design lessons that not only meet the needs of the student but their interests also.

Students also spoke of the need for teachers to consider their other obligations such as sport and the time that many ensembles are on offer. Friday afternoon and evening times were deemed most difficult. A further consideration is from children who live in rural areas and need to travel to get to town for tuition. This adds another dimension to be understood by the teacher and accommodated. The students did not offer this as an excuse for not practicing but offered this point for consideration when timetabling lessons.

## Child protection

Challenges of occupational health and safety, duty of care and child protection are underpinned by a Code of Conduct which aims to clarify the conduct expected in the performance of all duties and offers a guide to solving ethical issues. For many of the teachers the current physical environment they teach in causes difficulty in following best practices regarding child protection. One teacher felt strongly about this and described his practice: *"I leave my door open whenever I teach, or I have ... if I have a parent in there. When I teach I have my windows widely open or the blinds ... I don't teach behind blinds, that sort of thing"*.

## Teachers

Teachers are central in the conversation about professional practice of pedagogical activities offered by the regional conservatorium.

### Teacher preparation

At present there are a number of tertiary institutions in NSW that offer music related qualifications. It is beneficial to note that the majority of awards offered are performance based and not pedagogically oriented. This confirms the findings of Clinch (1983) that the majority of those said to be "qualified instrumental teachers" were trained by institutions whose main objective is to train them to be musicians, not teachers. The level of qualification however affects the rate of pay: *"So if you come in and you've been to a conservatorium and you've done your four years, then you're on the full pay and if you come in and you haven't got a formal training you're on what we call an Associate rate"* (Executive Director). However, for teachers who are affected by the associate rate of pay, they felt confident that working at the conservatorium offered them more than in a private studio as the conservatorium provided administrative support to collect and process fees and insurance coverage. One teacher revealed during an interview: *"I in fact ... I've studied music theory up to Grade Six, and did my exams – I was going to go through to Grade Eight, but ended up going to India and studying music in India from ... on and off for over a decade. So I didn't ever go back to my studies. So therefore, my qualifications as a ... a schoolteacher, ... are non-existent"*.

It is clear in this case that no mechanism is in existence for attracting staff with such professional qualifications in pedagogical instrumental teaching. The only distinction or attraction is in the rate of pay. This is unfortunate when Mahamuti (2009) emphasised the importance of professional development for teachers in increasing student retention and found teachers who held doctoral degrees were half as likely to lose students than all other teachers.

## Professional practice

Paramount to the professional practice is the teacher-student relationship through "knowing their students". The majority of teachers viewed themselves as a performer first and then as a teacher or mentor second. While this was a strong response of teachers, one teacher shared: *"essentially I view my role as an educator being different for every student. Primarily I'm employed as an instrumentalist teacher. I think that's very specific and if at the end of the day that's what the parents are willing to pay for and that's what they want, that's what I'll give them, but my role will change depending on the student"*. Discussion followed and consensus found that the role of the teacher is multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and most importantly variable for each student. The different roles performed within each teacher-student relationship supports the belief that no one method of teaching could be adopted, but rather methods should be adapted to suit the needs of the student. The ability to adapt or change, for most, is learned over time. This professional evolution for some has resulted in a shift from performer towards teacher: *"I'm no longer a performer; I don't class myself as a performer, even though I thoroughly enjoyed performing. The opportunities to perform are very few and far between, particularly when I am a very busy teacher ... Most of the time I'm just a teacher."*

## Pedagogical activities

The pedagogical activities offered by the conservatorium are essentially student-centred. It was expressed that while the student is central to the activities planned, the appropriate direction followed is negotiated between the student's needs and the teacher's experience. This dialogic negotiation is crucial in the maintenance of the student-teacher relationship: *"I draw on my own experience as a musician and performer and, no doubt, my own training"*.

Motivating the parents to be involved with the students' learning was shared as an important

component for the student to make progress. The process is organic; it grows, and evolves over time. It cannot be forced, but rather reinforced through gentle persuasion and coaxing. The student-teacher relationship is no longer between two persons but a third person, the parent, is now part of the interaction. This triad relationship enables the transaction of music tuition to be participatory and interactive. Teachers who have experienced this triad relationship reaffirmed the development of such a relationship of musical interaction through instruction as critical for success. Not only is the process organic, but the role of the teacher too appears to organically transform over time with each student and parent. This organic transformation informs the development of curriculum underpinned by the student/musician/performer/teacher and parent: *"what informs my teaching standards or core knowledge or the assessment procedures? My own experience, my own knowledge, not a recognised syllabus!"*

## Conclusion

Schwab's (1969) four commonplaces of schooling (milieu, subject matter, students and teachers) have been applied in this study not only to organise and interrogate the data, but have been invaluable in highlighting intersections that exist between the four commonplaces. Six main areas of intersection between the commonplaces of schooling have been identified: the triangulation of expertise (teacher, performer and musician); a curriculum design that is student centred; mechanisms to enhance the sustainability of a regional conservatorium; adaptation of pre-established curricula; students need to be prepared for a musical life beyond the Conservatorium; and parental involvement is central for success.

The triangulation of expertise (teacher, performer and musician) is paramount to the connection and interaction between teacher and student. It provides the opportunity for musical interaction and the necessary engagement for

a master apprenticeship relationship to evolve. Musical interaction that is responsive to the student requires a curriculum design that is student centred. This places responsibility firmly on the teacher to establish, design and develop a curriculum that not only meets but also anticipates the needs of the student.

Mechanisms to enhance the sustainability of a regional conservatorium and the capacity to secure funding from alternate sources need to be established and inform policy makers. It is evident that regional conservatorium provide an extant of musical services to regional, rural and remote communities and without continued financial provision the necessary infrastructure, management and administration required to afford regional Australia equitable access to musical opportunities will no longer exist. Such financial provision would not result in free musical tuition, but rather make the tuition more accessible and affordable, allowing students to buy into the transaction at a much lower rate than would otherwise be the case.

In the absence of a prescribed curriculum there is a need to adapt pre-established curricula to establish a framework to craft the professional practice of instrumental studio pedagogy. This framework would be descriptive and not prescriptive, and would offer instrumental teachers the means upon which musical education curriculum productivity can be built. This would enable the teacher to appraise and respond to the priorities of the student and shape pedagogical positioning of musical activities to assure a musical life beyond the conservatorium.

Parental involvement is crucial for success. It is advocated that their involvement be organic and not imposed. The organic nature of the involvement is relational and is worth trialling to support student success. Schwab (1969) advocated that the heart of curriculum transfer was in the classroom, however this investigation underscores that a triad relationship (teacher/student/parent) is at the heart of curriculum

transfer in the music studio in the regional conservatorium. It is anticipated that this research project has provided the foundation for extension to direct the research from investigation of a regional conservatorium to the investigation of studio pedagogical professional practice in regional, national and international contexts through further ethnographic case studies.

***Preliminary findings were published in ISME 2012 conference proceedings.***

## References

- Atkinson, P., & Hammersley, M. (1994). Ethnography and participant observation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 248-261). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Barr, A. S. (2007). Reversing the pyramid. *American Music Teacher*, 57(1), 24-26.
- Breen, J. & Hogg, N. (1999). Suzuki music. In D. Forrest (Ed.), *Advancing music education in Australia* (pp. 13-14). Melbourne: Australian Society for Music Education.
- Bridges, D. (1988). The private music teacher in Australia. *Australian Journal of Music Education*, 1(1), 49-55.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods* (3 ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carey, G., Draper, P., Lebler, D. & McWilliam, E. (2006). *Learning and unlearning: New challenges for teaching in conservatoires*. Paper presented at the The Reflective Conservatoire Conference 2006, 16-18 February.
- Clinch, P. (1983). Some aspects of instrumental tuition in Australia. *The Australian Journal of Music Education*, 2(1), 1-2.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathmunde, K. & Whalen, S. (1993). *Talented teenagers: The roots of success and failure*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Creech, A. & Hallam, S. (2009). Interaction in instrumental learning: the influence of interpersonal dynamics on parents. *International Journal of Music Education*, 27(2), 93-104.
- Davidson, J. W., Moore, D. G., Sloboda, J. A. & Howe, M. J. A. (1998). Characteristics of music teachers and the progress of young instrumentalists. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 46(2), 141-160.
- Della Pietra, C. J. & Campbell, P. S. (1995). An ethnography of improvisation training in a music methods course. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 43, 112-126.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I. & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Ford, T. (2009). I just want to teach the flute! *Pan: The Flute Magazine*, 28(3), 39-43.
- Gadiel, T. (2009). *Education investment*. Sydney: Parliament of New South Wales Retrieved from [http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA200904\\_01014?open&refNavID=HA8\\_1](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LA200904_01014?open&refNavID=HA8_1).
- Goodrich, A. (2007). Peer mentoring in a high school jazz ensemble. *Journal of Research in Music Education*(55), 31-47.
- Hallam, S. (1998). The predictors of achievement and dropout in instrumental tuition. *Psychology of Music*, 26(2), 116-132.
- Hewitt, T. W. (2006). *Understanding and shaping curriculum: What we teach and why*. Sage Publications, Incorporated.
- Jaffurs, S. E. (2004). The impact of informal learning practices in the classroom, or how I learned how to teach from garage band. *International Journal Of Music Education*, 22, 189-200.
- Keeler, S. (2011). Working the ensemble experience into the private piano studio. *Clavier Companion*, 3(1), 20-23.
- Klopper, C. J. (2009). Bringing music skills to remote schools. *Music Forum*, 15, 36-37.
- Lierse, S. (2007a). Discussion of the national review of school music education. Deakin West ACT: Australian College of Educators.
- Lierse, S. (2007b). *The private music studio: Celebrating a micro musical community* Paper presented at the Celebrating Musical Communities: Proceedings of the 40th Anniversary National Conference, Nedlands, WA.
- Mahamuti, G. (2009). Professional development makes you recession-resistant. *Clavier Companion*, 1(5), 48-50.
- McPhee, E. (2012). *Scared to share: Studio teachers and an asynchronous web forum for pedagogical learning*. Paper presented at the International Society for Music Education (ISME) 30th World Conference on Music Education, Thessaloniki, Greece.
- Mitchell, N. (2012). *Evaluative performances as a contributor to music learning: Conditions for positive evaluation experiences for beginning and intermediate piano students*. Paper presented at the International Society for Music Education (ISME) 30th World Conference on Music Education, Thessaloniki, Greece.
- Montemayor, M. (2008). Flauto: An ethnographic study of a highly successful private studio. *International Journal of Music Education*, 26(4), 286-301.
- Pinar, W. (1995). *Understanding curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses* (Vol. 17). New York: Peter Lang Pub Incorporated.
- Pitts, S. E., Davidson, J. W. & McPherson, G. E. (2000). Models of success and failure in instrumental learning: Case studies of young players in the first 20 months of learning. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 146(1), 51-69.
- Schwab, J. J. (1969). The practical: A language for curriculum. *School Review*, 78(1), 10-23.
- Thompson, S. (1983). Studio teaching: Some present thoughts. *The Australian Journal of Music Education*, 2(1), 2-3.
- Zhukov, K. (2004). *Teaching styles and student behaviour in instrumental music lessons in Australian conservatoriums*. (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). University of New South Wales, Sydney.

**Christopher Klopper** is a senior lecturer in the School of Education and Professional studies, Gold Coast Campus. He lectures in arts education and music education. He gained extensive experience through teaching at both state and private schools nationally and internationally, from early childhood through to University level as well as curriculum development, design and delivery for the Education Department in South Africa. Christopher publishes in the field of teaching quality in Higher Education through peer observation and student evaluation and pre-service arts education, more specifically relating to music education; intentional provision of music in early childhood settings; and trans-national intercultural musical communication.

**Bianca Power** is a PhD candidate at Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia. Her research is in the field of primary school arts education. Bianca's research interests include classroom-based practice, arts education as an umbrella term, and the use of portraiture and crystallization.