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# Teacher Education and Music Education: an editorial view

Keith Swanwick and John Paynter

The articles in this Issue of the *BJME* are all focused on the education of music teachers, though from different parts of the world. Betty Hanley, writing from Canada, is concerned especially with students' involvement in their own learning and with the development of student competencies and the ability to be critical; while another Canadian colleague, Hugh Johnston, investigates the importance of feedback and peer-assessment in teacher education, with special reference to acquiring the skills of rehearsing and directing performance groups.

Jenny Hughes, writing from Worcester, sees her college's involvement in teacher education as having an effect on a wider community well beyond a narrow definition of the functions of an institution and formal courses. Edward Gifford reports a longitudinal study in Queensland, Australia, on the way that music courses affect students' attitudes towards music and their own confidence in working with music. His conclusion seems to be that the results of a formal music programme for pre-service primary teachers may need to carry a musical health warning, especially if they are heavily skill-intensive and instruction-based. Students appear to lose musical confidence, and something of their sense of the value of music over three years of training. Dr Gifford wonders if enough stress is laid on the idea of musical encounter, developing a willingness to respond to the work of students in a sensitive and rich musical context.

Pre-service courses are also the focus of the article by Neryl Jenneret, again from Australia and working in New South Wales. She draws our attention to the fact that, although school syllabuses are often based on the integrated triad of performing, composing and audience-listening, the structure and method of courses in tertiary education frequently follow the older conservatory model of isolated lessons and classes and courses that pay little regard to the importance of composing. The effect of this implicit model on student-teachers is likely to counteract the efforts of more explicit liberal principles being advocated in the educational strands of courses.

## The musical preparation of teachers

There have, of course, been some very important developments over the past thirty years or more, broadly moving to fulfil the schools' need for musicians who are committed educators, and well prepared teachers who are active, creative musicians. It may appear superfluous to say it now – but there was a time when, perhaps, it was not quite so self-evident: at the heart of music education is the experience of music, for which there is no substitute. And, if that is the ideal then the priority for every music teacher is not merely to know a lot *about* music but, above all, *to know a lot of music*.

Traditionally, school music teachers were recruited from the conservatoires and the

universities, the former with their emphasis upon executant skills and what was then widely known as ‘paper work’, the latter concerned largely with mechanical ‘H & C’ and the factual surface of music history (1500–1883 or, if you were lucky, 1500–1934; music ended with Wagner or Elgar; anything more recent had not ‘stood the test of time’ and was, therefore, by definition, unworthy of a student’s attention). There were notable exceptions, naturally; but, as a preparation for teaching, the average music course in higher education had its limitations.

The other route into teaching was through the Training Colleges, whose music courses were for the most part watered down versions of what the lecturers themselves had experienced as students at Colleges of Music or universities. To this was added a certain amount of professional training; but here again there was little incentive to improve things because the expectations, professionally, of music teachers, and of the extent of their first-hand acquaintance with music – as opposed to gleaned information and opinions – was modest, to say the least.

Then things began to change. Notably, university degree courses started to acknowledge the importance of performance; not in an attempt to take over the traditional role of the conservatoires (preparing players for the music profession) but quite simply recognising that the study of music at any level – and not least in higher education – could no longer afford to ignore direct musical experience. This indeed is where understanding begins: with the sounds of music and our inventive/interpretive involvement with those sounds. Only when we have encountered music from the inside can we go on to objectify it, discuss it, research its background, compare it with other examples, and draw the sort of conclusions which will provide a base for further musical exploration.<sup>1</sup>

In Britain it was, understandably, the founding fathers of music departments in the ‘new universities’ of the 1960s who had the greatest inducement to strike out in uncharted directions: Wilfrid Mellers, for example, a distinguished writer on music and a composer, who appointed first to his staff other creative musicians and then encouraged a stream of some of the world’s finest composers to flow through his department, sharing their thoughts and their music with his students. Not least among Meller’s innovations was to include Music Education in the degree programme, giving it equal status with all other aspects of musical study. At that time this was a unique move for a university Music course, but one which seemed perfectly natural. For, coming to understand children’s perceptions of music, how they learn in music, and how they can be helped to exercise their imagination and inventiveness with sound, could have importance for just about any students of music; and as for the prospective teachers among them, if the mould was ever to be broken, surely they would need opportunities to think deeply about the task of educating *through* music, and what better atmosphere in which to do that than one of active musical discovery?

Ultimately such trends became established practice in a number of institutions, in due course feeding back into the curriculum of schools and influencing the GCSE syllabus and the National Curriculum. Today in Britain we expect the content of musical higher education to be stylistically, historically and geographically wide-ranging. Courses tend to be participatory, flexible in organisation (often allowing each student a choice of options rather than channelling everyone into the same programme) and drawing substantially upon students’ initiative. Instead of attempting a sketchy coverage of huge historical periods, with little or no time to come to terms with the music itself, the pattern is likely to be geared to developing musical insight through extended in-depth work on a smaller number of topics. After all, quite apart from questions of methodology, it is important to recognise that, in music as in every other

academic area, the second half of this century has seen an expansion of ideas and techniques beyond anything that could have been imagined 40 years ago: no one course can cover it all.

Typically, an undergraduate programme today will be organized in units – generally open-ended seminars and ‘workshops’ instead of conventional lecture series; closely focused fields of study rather than broad sweeps. Almost certainly it will feature a much wider historical view than formerly, but will also provide opportunities to explore current musical expression in many genres (including electro-acoustic and computer music, jazz, rock and music from diverse cultures). Performance, as a way into the study of a given topic, will probably feature strongly. Similarly, students will investigate themes not only by means of conventional literature-based research, but also through their own creative efforts, taking ideas from the topic as starting points for composition.

Another important characteristic of the change that has come over music in higher education has been the gradual aligning of institutional objectives. The Polytechnics, in becoming part of the university system, have in some instances brought with them other institutions with a long tradition of enlightened teacher-preparation courses (for example, Dartington College of Arts in association with the University of Plymouth). Over a period of years the Colleges of Music too have broadened their educational scope, not only in line with certain of the university sector developments but also through novel course which move into completely new territory, though still deriving strength from the Colleges’ traditional orientation to performance. (For example, the highly successful Music Performance and Communication Skills course at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama; the long standing joint degree programme of the Royal Northern College of Music and the University of Manchester; the exciting possibilities of the new linked course operating between the Royal Academy of Music and King’s College in the University of London; and the integration of Birmingham Conservatoire and Birmingham Polytechnic – with its well established reputation for the training of music teachers – to become now the faculty of music in the University of Central England.)

All of this should bode well for music in schools. There have been a number of striking instances of how influences from the musical preparation of teachers have not only fed back into the schools (as we might expect, or at least might hope for), but have then had a reciprocal effect upon the subsequent development of music courses in higher education. Perhaps the most outstanding development has been in Music Technology, where pure research in university music departments was taken up in commercial developments and then exploited creatively in schools by teachers whose interest in its potential had been kindled during their own student days. In numerous instances this has completely revolutionised the school music curriculum, with the result that applicants for places in university music departments now have very high expectations of what those departments can offer in this field. Very recently several new degree programmes have started up, and others are on the stocks, recruiting simultaneously through Departments of Electronic Engineering and Departments of Music, simply to meet the demand that is now coming from the schools. At the same time, taught Masters courses in Music Technology are attracting a not insignificant number of experienced music teachers seeking the now essential technological enrichment. Yet, just at the time when the links between Higher Education music courses and teacher preparation would seem to be offering a more fruitful liaison than ever before, the general aspects of teacher education, which we had thought were so well established and were all the time being improved, have come under attack.

## Preparation for school classrooms

Here in Britain we face a continual onslaught by those who seem to regard higher education with suspicion and teacher education as largely unnecessary, beyond having a first degree and picking up a few tips from a mentor 'on the job'. In line with this prevailing theory, twenty-four weeks of a 36 week PGCE are now to be spent 'on school premises'.

The basic argument is that teachers are not doing their job properly and that this must be essentially the result of poor training. Evidence is produced to back up this assertion in the form of various HMI reports on teacher performance. But are HMI reports on teacher ineffectiveness really reliable evidence of poor initial training? Our attention is often drawn to *The New Teacher in School* (1988), the HMI Report in which we are told that 25 per cent of lessons taken by newly-qualified teachers are less than satisfactory. Considering the strains of the probationary year and the failure to implement the James Report by supporting probationary teachers in their first year to the extent of giving them only half a timetable, this seems hardly surprising, if regrettable. The report on secondary schools, 1988 – *Secondary Schools, 1982–1986* – shows the reality, that probationary teachers taught for 81.5 percent of the week against the average of 83.3 percent for teachers beyond the first year of teaching and in their early years of service – no effective difference.

We should notice that the estimate of 25 percent 'unsatisfactory' lessons is *not* confined to teachers in their first year of service. Concern has been expressed by HMI about the quality of work of some teachers with many years of classroom experience. Take, for instance *Standard in Education, 1977–88*, the Annual Report of HMI Chief Inspector of Schools (DES, February, 1989). Here, in the context of an otherwise generally favourable reference to GCSE teaching we are told:

Four lessons out of five were judged to be satisfactory or better in our recent report, a higher proportion than is usually reported in our inspection findings.

In other words, 20 percent of the teaching was thought unsatisfactory and this was considered an improvement on the usual performance of teachers, while around 25 percent of observed teaching tends to be below an acceptable level. What are we to make of this? Is it reasonable to expect probationary teachers to perform *better* than teachers in general, most of whom would have had substantial experience? Is experience by itself likely to bring about better standards? Can schools by themselves produce better teachers? The only inference we can draw from this much-cited 'evidence' is that classroom experience *by itself* appears to be no guarantee of effective professional practice. Experience can de-sensitise as well as inform.

Arguments based on this level of statistical evidence need to be conducted with more critical circumspection. One thing seems clear though; the assertion that standards of teaching can be improved or even maintained by simply adopting a simple 'apprenticeship' model has no empirical or logical support. Practical experience has to be assimilated, reflected upon, shared and refined and, in our case, has to be related to a deepened awareness of the nature of musical experience and related possibilities in music education.

Beyond this fundamental requirement, intending music teachers in schools need to be prepared to engage in critical analysis of classroom materials, the practice and evaluation of teaching approaches, the sharing of professional perspectives and helped to gain insights into the social, psychological, political and organisational dimensions of education, above all, extending their understanding of children. Any objective

appraisal of the content of contemporary initial training courses would find most time committed to curriculum subject work, much of this located in schools or focused on school experience and aiming to assist in the development of effective and reflective teachers.

Students on one PGCE course told us that they value the support of widely experienced tutors, sharing ideas with their peers, gaining an overview of the curriculum and of issues including assessment and testing, discussion of key issues such as class, race, gender and special needs, references to relevant literature and research along with access to a good library and media resources.<sup>2</sup>

They valued opportunities to reflect, evaluate, re-evaluate and analyse; the time to place the job of 'teacher' within a clear framework, getting help with lesson preparation, systematic help with teaching skills and insights into the elements of classroom organisation in relation to the subject they are trying to teach. They are not interested in what one student called 'off the cuff pedagogy' and they value professional contacts with teachers in *various* schools, believing experience in a single school to be restrictive. Some felt that the teaching profession would, in time, become de-skilled, de-professionalised.

Teaching is not a mindless activity, something just to be copied, and many of our best young graduates are not going to be persuaded otherwise. Nor are they convinced that these virtues are best promoted merely by classroom experience or that schools as they are presently staffed and funded could achieve these aims. One PGCE student completed a successful and rewarding teaching practice in a very supportive school where there were excellent role models and confidence among the teachers that they could handle a large part of teacher training. Even so, she wrote saying, 'it would have been a disaster if I had done my training based only in school – I don't think I would have lasted'. It is very easy for the outsider, the non-professional, to underestimate how difficult and complex teaching really is.

In the same study, over 200 collaborating teachers in schools gave their views. Over two-thirds felt unable to assume the major responsibility for the training of students, yet this is now what is happening at a forced rate of change. Only around a fifth to a quarter of the teachers said they gave basic ideas for lessons or helped in detailed lesson planning, and the same proportion 'hardly ever' gave help with class management. Whilst there may be exceptions, many teachers seem to depend upon students as working colleagues rather than regard them as only needing careful initiation into the profession. And indeed, student teachers can sometimes be 'new blood' that all professions need, bring fresh ideas and energy to their subject and to teaching without the cynicism that can so easily take over. The transaction between schools and students in teacher education is a two-way process.

An uncritical use of statistics, coupled with a naive and simplistic view of the job of teaching, may have a popular following but is hopelessly inadequate as a basis for evaluating professional preparation. It is no answer to worries about falling standards. The teaching profession will begin to lose its cutting edge if systematically deprived of opportunities for critical reflection, self-evaluation and the extension of perspectives beyond the confines of one classroom.

It is time that those responsible for Initial teacher education were permitted to get on with the job of developing courses in closer collaboration with teachers working in schools. This will need proper funding. Instead – and without the prospect of adequate resources – teacher educators based in and out of school are being compelled to dance to every tune piped by government or whistled by academics working in other university and college departments, well-insulated from schools. Their knowledge so

often seems to be based on a shaky reading of statistics and on unrealistic and outdated views of training courses, possibly coloured by a childhood perception of teaching being basically easy and uncomplicated; really only 'commonsense'. After all, we've all been to school haven't we?

Systematic help with teaching skills; developing and defining curriculum subjects in relevant and robust ways; setting the social and psychological context of educational transactions; giving dependable professional and personal support and encouraging critical thinking against a background of broad and structured school experience: these are the key functions of teacher education courses. Some of the implications of these requirements can be detected in the articles that follow. Many of the following contributions come from parts of the world where the de-professionalisation of teachers has not begun. We wish them well!

## End Notes

- 1 '...one learns about sound only by making sound, about music only by making music. All our investigations into sound should be certified empirically by making sounds ourselves and by examining the results...contact with musical sound is made and this is more vital than the most gluttonous listening program imaginable.' (Schafer, R. M. (1967) *Ear Cleaning: Notes for an Experimental Music Course*. Don Mills. BMI Canada Ltd. p. 1.)
- 2 Swanwick, K. (1990) The Necessity of Teacher Education, Chapter in *Initial Teacher Education*, Ed. Graves, N., Kogan Page.