THE YOUNG INSTRUMENTAL TEACHER: LEARNING TO TEACH MUSIC WHILE A STUDENT AT A CONSERVATOIRE

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Introduction
Teachers of class music in maintained schools in England must have QTS (qualified teacher status), which is gained following training and assessment that lasts at least until the age of 24. Yet roughly half of the students who enter a conservatoire in England at the average age of 19 have already worked as instrumental teachers\(^1\). A view that instrumental teaching can be delivered effectively by musicians without teacher training is embedded in the educational systems of many countries. Researchers in England and Australia\(^2\) have commented that students training as class teachers may meanwhile work as instrumental teachers without any relevant training.

We ask whether it really is the case that the needs of instrumental students, many of them children, can be met effectively by music undergraduates who have not been trained as teachers. We explore this issue by considering the results of a questionnaire study, and a case study, carried out in one conservatoire in England. This conservatoire, like others in the UK, trains students as performers and composers, and does not offer any courses that lead to QTS.

Key findings
- Conservatoire students look forward to including work as an instrumental teacher in their portfolio career
- Conservatoire students, particularly females, have a positive – and contemporary – attitude to the processes and purposes of instrumental teaching
- Nevertheless, some of the instrumental teaching provided by music undergraduates has the capacity to limit their instrumental students’ progress and continued engagement in instrumental music
- Training for music undergraduates, that is timely and focused upon their needs, may provide a way forward.

Aims of the study
This study addresses a pressing issue in music education in the UK. Music undergraduates are frequently in demand as instrumental teachers, although they have had little, if any, teacher training. But might they do more harm than good and, if so, what can we – as researchers or curriculum developers, for example – do to ameliorate this situation?

Methods and methodology
The study includes a mix of approaches to data collection, and a correspondingly mixed approach to data analysis.

First, we revisit the findings of a questionnaire survey of 61 3rd year conservatoire undergraduates, carried out in 2003. Students were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements using a 7-point scale, where 1=agree strongly and 7=disagree

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strongly. The questionnaire was developed through conversation with students at the conservatoire, and has also been employed in research studies in Australia and the US, and subsequent studies at the conservatoire. Second, a student who is active as an instrumental teacher, and who demonstrated – through her questionnaire response – that she has a positive and contemporary attitude to the processes and purposes of instrumental teaching, agreed to become the subject of a case study. This case study was carried out through e-mail correspondence with the principal researcher during summer 2006.

Main research findings
The conservatoire undergraduates emerge\(^3\) from the questionnaire study as young musicians, often already experienced as instrumental teachers, who both expect and hope to include instrumental teaching in their career, do not expect to be bored by it, consider that teaching will improve their playing, think that they need to be trained as teachers, do not think that good performers always make good teachers, look forward to working out how to improve their teaching and seeing their students progress, and want their lessons to be fun. They also agree, but less strongly, that they would like their teaching to include composing and improvisation as well as performing, reject the notion that performance is improved best through repetitive drill, and want to teach students to be expressive from the earliest stages of learning a piece. Male undergraduates are significantly\(^4\) more likely to aspire to teach advanced students or students who find music easy, consider that staff notation should be introduced from a first lesson, and favour repetitive drill as a means of improving performances.

The case study conservatoire student, who we call Lucy, emerged from her questionnaire as even more disposed than average to teach well. She speaks of having begun instrumental teaching out of financial need, but has now 'caught the bug'. She has researched instrumental teaching, for example by observing her own first teacher at work, and voluntarily and deliberately engages in various forms of expansive\(^5\) learning in schools. She spends time planning her lessons and finding or writing new repertoire, is working out how to teach groups of students, and not only individuals, places emphasis on making her lessons fun, and encourages students to listen to, and improve, their sound. Further, she directs an ensemble – including all her students – at one of her schools. And she writes of evaluating her teaching thoroughly, and adjusting it accordingly.

But are any of her instrumental students suffering through her inexperience, and isolation, as a teacher? And does it matter – when she writes of carrying out long term planning – that she has never taught a student for a period of longer than a few months?

Like other music undergraduates also working in instrumental teaching, Lucy is labouring under disadvantages that are not experienced by musicians who are committing to a career in class music, through taking a statutory teacher training course. For example she:

\(^3\) The criteria being used here for general agreement, or general disagreement, with a statement are 2.6 or 5.4 respectively. This is a pragmatic way of looking at the data, which flowed from the distribution.

\(^4\) \(p < 0.05\), t test

• cannot discuss her ideas, and share her experience routinely, with lecturers and peers who are on a teacher training course
• feels that her teaching is limited through lack of knowledge of repertoire. As she develops, and casts around for, repertoire that meets her needs she makes some inspired choices but also possibly one or two that are less happy
• draws heavily on observations of just one experienced teacher of beginners to guide her approach to teaching.

Conclusions/ways forward
There is no political will, in the UK, to support any view that instrumental teachers must have QTS. And comparative studies with other institutions have shown that reorganising music higher education so that aspiring performers are taught alongside aspiring teachers is not always a solution either.

We conclude that providing elements of teacher training that music undergraduates may participate in voluntarily, when they feel that this is appropriate to their professional development, may be a more effective way forward – and the spoken version of this paper will describe some of the steps already taken in the conservatoire that is the focus of this written paper.