



## COVER SHEET

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# THE MUSIC TEACHER AS CULTURAL MANAGER

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*The concept of teacher as cultural manager examines two teachers working in a difficult school context and compares their characteristics and behaviour in this context to theory derived from a larger ongoing study. The paper outlines a preliminary study that has been created to identify a framework of research strategies that are able to capture the characteristics of good practice in music teaching that promotes social inclusion. The study is philosophically founded upon Buber's notion of inclusive relationships and explores a description of the characteristics of the teacher and community derived from a doctoral study into the meaning of music to children and the ways in which teachers give access to meaningful music making. The findings suggest that the teacher performs multiple roles to facilitate access to meaningful music experience through their relationship with community and the students. The role of teacher as builder of context and as a manager of the cultural life of students emerges as an important concept that requires further study in a larger investigation.*

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will examine the idea of defining the role of the classroom music teacher within an Australian school music context. I will examine the question: *What are the characteristics of teachers that facilitate access to meaningful and engaging music experience?* This will be examined in the light of a case study, which began its second iteration in March 2005. The research presented here has been drawn entirely from my own meta-research observations of the teachers, coaches, students and research reports presented by post graduate student participant observers, video and audiotape data. These data will be compared with those that are part of a larger ongoing study which documents innovation in sound curriculum (DILLON, 2004, 2005). The presentation here will begin by providing background, then briefly outline methodology and analysis followed by a discussion of results that synthesises the relationship between the background literature and the present case. The research represented here are preliminary findings only and will be more fully examined within the context of larger and a more culturally diverse sample in publications at the conclusion of this current phase of the study. The intent here is to continuously build on the model of teacher as cultural manager through the addition of further cases in a continuous and dynamic study. The primary purpose of the paper is to examine research strategies, sites and teachers that may be able to encapsulate the qualities of music teaching and coaching that affect or promote social inclusion through creative music making in schools and communities.

## PLACING MYSELF IN THE STUDY

As I am the principal instrument for this preliminary research I choose to adopt a post positivist stance in this discussion using the 'I' to refer to my own experiences and observations. I do this to acknowledge the influence that I might have on these data and observations. A post positivist perspective is not 'objective' but one which seeks to maintain rigour and accountability through acknowledging the influences of the observer on the observed and putting into place some self checking mechanisms to question the reconstructions of data and seeking transferable outcomes rather than generalisable ones. In this study I have utilised member checking and negative case analysis (DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2000; LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985) to do this and also place the study within a larger body of long termed research in this area undertaken over the last ten years. It is for this reason that I have included citations of my own publications frequently so that these earlier studies can be acknowledged as providing a framework and theory for this study. I should here explain that I have been a secondary music teacher for almost 20 years before working as a researcher and my own lived experience as a cultural manager in a school influences my understanding of this role. This idea has emerged from the recognition that a school is a village like

community where art and life have the possibility of being integrated (Dillon, 2000) and the role of the teacher is to manage the cultural lives and values of children and as Buber suggests educate their character (BUBER, 1949). This paper outlines the journey of these earlier ideas from their first observation in a school where I taught music through academic research in a doctoral dissertation and several major funded research projects examining the transferability of these concepts to new contexts and people.

## TEACHING AS AN INCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Philosopher Martin Buber describes the inclusive relationship between teacher and student as one where the teacher takes the students into a selection of their life as a human being (BUBER, 1949). This is not friendship as it is not an *I and Thou*, equal and reciprocal relationship (BUBER, 1975). It is a friendly relationship and from the students' viewpoint may be perceived as friendship. Inclusion involves the teacher acknowledging the students' humanity and the conscious act of taking them into *a selection of their self*, in this case as a music maker themselves. The teacher acknowledges also the responsibility for the well-being of the student and the power differential between them which presents moral and pedagogical obligations to not abuse this relationship of trust. 'Inclusion' in this sense is not about students' ethnicity, disability or difference but the acknowledgement of the shared humanity and the potential for learning to take place. When the teacher prepares a selection of their life for students to experience and the student then turns to the teacher with a question about that shared experience then, Buber suggests they are ready to learn. The teacher's embodiment of musical knowledge and their construction of this selection of it for the student is the learning and teaching process and it is this understanding which reveals the characteristics, role and responsibilities of the teacher.

For teachers of music dealing with embodied knowledge and understandings and faced with communicating both analytical and intuitive knowledge (K. SWANWICK, 1994) Buber's notion of taking a student into a selection of their lives as a musician is an important concept. It is this idea of relationship that is in need of further discussion in relation to the teacher's stance and the kinds of characteristics of teaching and teachers that facilitate a meaningful music experience.

## BACKGROUND

The teacher is the conduit through which meaningful experience and learning flows. The idea of the teacher as a builder of music learning experiences that has evolved from constructivists (PERKINS, 1986, 1988) and constructionist (PAPERT, 1996) educational theory has been influential in classroom music. Notions of experiential music/arts education (DEWEY, 1989) have provided a philosophical basis for learning by engaging with making music that has informed curriculum in school education in the United Kingdom, the USA, Australia and New Zealand for many years. My own work which examined the student as maker of music and the teacher as builder of music learning context has examined these ideas through a long-term case study methodology that exposed these theories to the voices of children and teachers themselves within a distinctive Australian context (DILLON, 1995a, 1995b, 1999b, 2000, 2001). The 'student as maker' thesis argued that through access to meaningful music experience personal transformation occurs which has generic outcomes and impact on learning, health and wellbeing (DILLON, in press). One of the things that I found that was unique about the early examination of literature was that the role of the teacher and the relationship between student and teacher was not clear.

In my own case study research I proposed a definition of the role of the classroom music teacher and examined Martin Buber's philosophical discussions of the particular relationship ascribed to that between teacher and student which he called 'inclusion' (BUBER, 1949). These ideas were examined in context and from both the teachers and students' perspectives privileging their voices and attempting to 'put the meat on the bones of theory'. It was this study and the observations of

teachers in the doctoral study that has led me to ask about the characteristics of teachers that provide access to meaningful music making.

## **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS THAT FACILITATE ACCESS TO MEANINGFUL AND ENGAGING MUSIC EXPERIENCE?**

In DILLON (2001) I articulated the following characteristics of the teacher and their role:

“The characteristics of the teacher most valued by interviewees was made up of the following actions and character: the teacher must be a maker, animateur, and a builder of psychological environment and creator of atmosphere and attitude; they must be personally encouraging, open and have an interest in what the children bring to the relationship and value their interest in music; and most importantly they must facilitate experience through imaginative curriculum.” (DILLON, 2001:169)

The characteristics of the teacher in this definition are about personal qualities, values and actions. Whilst the idea of student centred learning is one which informs most educational contexts seldom do we acknowledge the idea that within this concept is a teacher who interprets, builds and creates the context inhabited by the student and teacher that is also influenced by the institutional aspects. Nor do the notions of student centredness acknowledge the power differential and the responsibilities of participants let alone clearly defining the roles and characteristics of the teacher. Perhaps this is because these understandings may have implications for personal criticisms that may be counter productive to teacher education or personal egos (BROWN, 2002). It is the intention of this paper to begin these discussions and add some observations from what might be described as a difficult context. It is where circumstances are ‘difficult’ that relationships between students and teachers can be highlighted and with music teaching the opportunities that music experiences might offer as a vehicle for self-expression and social inclusion makes these kinds of context more interesting to observe.

As well as a description of the teacher’s role and characteristics it is also essential to understand the influence of the context on the teacher’s delivery of curriculum. In DILLON (2006, in press) I described the characteristics of a community which encourage a sustainable interaction with meaningful music making as one that:

- Focuses upon increasing expressiveness and understanding about how human culture expresses itself in sound.
- Makes consciousness more complex through access to creative practice.
- Promotes self-motivated and autotelic behaviour.
- Is open to genre, time, culture and style as an opportunity for expanding our knowledge of expressive music making.
- Is culturally inclusive.
- Exhibits a productive relationship between analytical and intuitive musical knowledge and seeks to integrate experience through reflective practice.

These factors directly affect the values and psychological environment which the teacher enacts and provides the materials for constructing curriculum. Therefore any methodology that examines these ideas needs to be able to address the phenomenon of music making and learning relationships in context.

## **CREATIVE CASE METHODOLOGY**

The principal purpose of this paper is to explore the efficacy of what I term as creative case methodologies and the use of rich media and database technology as a means for more effectively capturing the essence of music experience and meaning. Several other recent studies I have undertaken suggested that data gathered and analysed in these ways are more compelling than

alphanumerically represented qualitative research which tends to conceal the essence of music experience.

The methodology for this study is a distinct form of case study that is inclusive of creative practice artefacts and experiences. I use the term *creative case study* to describe a case where artistic product is made collectively or individually or where artistic means of making sense of a phenomenon are employed as strategies for collecting or analysing data. It employs the strategies inherent within participant (JORGENSEN, 1989) and non-participant cases study (LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985) but seeks to privilege non-text data such as sound recordings and video of music making. These data are not textually summarised in analysis but synthesised through the researchers' own experiences of arts making as embodied knowledge. Where possible as with qualitative text the researcher allows the data to "speak for itself" and the audio-visual materials are presented to the viewer as raw data without interpretation beyond selection. It is hoped that through these means that the data will demonstrate musical knowledge and participant effect more directly than a textual interpretation which silences the musical experience.

We have found that documentary film making and web based constructions of data where the actual interview or creative work are 'on call' to be seen and heard to be both more compelling and rigorous than a transcription alone where the data itself is concealed by text description. (See EXAMPLE 1) The argument here is that in a creative case the musical product and experiences need to remain in their symbolic form so that the explanation is not privileged over the experience and the audience may also experience these data as music or musical experience (DILLON, 2006; DILLON & BROWN, in press). Whilst this may appear to be a relatively new approach to qualitative research it is only the digital management of these data which is 'new' as these kinds of values and strategies have been common to ethnomusicology for many years and it makes sense when observing music making within a community to adopt these kinds of strategies (MERRIAM, 1964; ELLIS, 1985, 1994).

This case study involved observing and collecting data at a single high school site and observing the interaction between teachers, community music coaches, students and the community over two successive periods of eleven weeks. Data was collected that consisted of: video interviews where the participants were asked to recount their musical life stories leading up to and including the Amp'd Up project experiences. This was done to place the short project within a larger body of experiences for the participants and to pay particular attention to the idea that these short experiences were not just successful because they simply paid attention to the phenomenon of engaging with music making. Video was used so that we could allow students to express musical ideas, which might not be apparent in a transcription. Sound recordings and video of student music making were included as data and proved to be the most compelling examples of their engagement. I observed the coaches and the teachers, who were also researching the experience as co-researchers. The participant observers' role was to document the process and experience from their own construction and delivery of curriculum and my own observations focused upon the teachers' interaction in context. Other data included reports on the project, performances and news clippings from the local and state media reports. The participant observer in his own study made a series of documentary DVD's and an interactive website to display his data alongside as journal article (SPIROVSKI, 2005). (See example 4)

The focus of my own observations was upon the teacher in context and in relationship with others both student and staff. It should be noted that several long-term research projects are also in progress at this site administered by the *save to DISC* project (DILLON, 2004, 2005; SPIROVSKI, 2005), involving three postgraduate students research studies. This case study constitutes an "in progress" snapshot of the role of the teacher in these projects.

## **A DIFFICULT CONTEXT**

The state high school where this research is taking place is considered to be a “difficult context” because of several factors. It has high proportions of disadvantaged groups: Australian Aboriginal (indigenous) students, South Sea Islanders and Asian and refugees. It is in an area where poverty and family problems are common. The current music project was instituted to provide a means of building on the inherent musical culture of the ethnic communities and enhancing the self-esteem and attendance of students at school. It is an ambitious program led by an innovative and passionate principal and involving music teachers, community music coaches drawn from the local community with financial and in kind support from the music industry, state and local government and Queensland University of Technology.

The AMP'd Up program simply involves students working with community coaches and teachers to compose and perform songs in a rock/contemporary pop music style which evolve syncretically (MERRIAM, 1964; VELLA, 2000) from the student's interest in music making. This tends to be diverse and involve a merging of the kinds of gospel music that might come from Samoan church communities, rock, R&B, beat box and rap music from their youth sub culture and a range of formal and informal music experiences. The teacher at the site suggested that the roots of the majority of islander music seemed to be Tamala Motown and Atlantic Soul music which the students called “old school”. This was evident in several of the compositions where students broke from a Rap and Beatbox tune into singing a sixties doo-wop classic in four-part harmony. (Link to EXAMPLE 2-RJM.mp3)

The original framework for the project was called BNS which stands for *Bringing New Styles* which encapsulates the idea of the music the students made as genuinely syncretic (MERRIAM, 1964) music that acts as a cultural adhesive to bring the students to shared meaning.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

What was observed came out of the uniqueness of the context. The classroom music teacher in this situation functions more clearly as the manager of the learning context and whilst their own musical knowledge and skill was useful in communication and organisation the coaches undertook the direct music learning. The following suggests the roles and perception of roles:

### The Teacher

The teacher takes on the role as manager/liason between the institutional system and students and interestingly between the students and the coaches. As suggested in the background research above the qualities of open-ness and genuine concern for the child was apparent in these observations as well as the construction of an encouraging psychological environment. Inherent in this role as cultural manager is the responsibility of the teacher for conflict resolution and providing a framework for fair and reasonable treatment and discipline. Such statements as ‘this is the only reason I came to school today’ and the observation of a young girl hitting another girl with a bass guitar and storming out of the classroom, highlight the fragility of the relationship these students have with school attendance and the fragility of their social relationship.

As ‘animateur’ the teacher understands the musical knowledge inherent in the experiences and creates the environment where it is encountered but also has to deal with day-to-day issues of focus and discipline that coaches are not trained to deal with. It seems that the character of the teacher either as strict disciplinarian or relaxed and approachable was not as important to students as clarity and consistency. This was apparent when interviewing the new teacher at the site. His more relaxed and easygoing style was perceived initially as weakness when compared to the more severe style of the previous teacher. Whilst students appreciate a more relaxed friendly tone the need for clarity and consistency is a more urgent one for students who may not have that as apart of their own

psychological environment at home. The complexity of the relationships of students with home and family is a complex one and the school recognises the potential for it to become a community hub to address these issues (K. LEMERLE y D. STEWART, 2004; D. STEWART y J. SUN, 2004; D. E. STEWART et al., 2004). The school's principal sees music as an important factor in promoting social inclusion and in providing means of combating low attendance and the connections to street crime and Chroming (paint sniffing). Some evidence for this was provided by (F. BAKER, 2004), although the questionnaire instrument was less successful due to the poor literacy and low response rates of families whose literacy and values might not value responding to written studies.

Both teachers in this study have conservatorium style training one in traditional art music and the other contemporary music. The success of the teachers in building an encouraging environment was apparent in both iterations of the case. Each of the aspects of the characteristic presented above was observed for both the teacher's and the community as a whole. What was of further interest was the perception of the coaches by students. Interestingly even the more recent music teacher inherited the aspects of 'authority' that came with the role of teacher and carried the characteristics of a school where the selection of teachers reflected the values of the principal in valuing the role of music in the students growth. This is an interesting institutional factor that refers to the community aspects outlined in the background presented here. While the teacher/ student relationship is clearer the role and responsibility of the community music coaches provides other characteristics for a learning relationship.

### **Music coaches**

The community music coaches have interesting backgrounds. Daniel the research student has a conservatorium background in contemporary music making and as a professional musician alongside experience in a ministry with church music making. Troy is an indigenous professional musician whose family are from the area. His partner Trevallyn is a black African woman who is also a professional singer/musician. These are all phenomenally talented musicians. What is interesting about the relationships of the coaches to the students is perhaps their projected image of who they are and what that means to their relationship with the students. Is it important 'who you are' here to relate to students with understanding from different life worlds? Is it important that the coaches be from a distinct ethnic community, is it enough to be a 'black generic symbol', a professional musician, a black professional musician, a black indigenous professional musician? All of these positions provide points of reference and respect as a model for the student. There are many layers of interaction here as the coaches model possibilities that the students might be able to emulate. Primarily though the coaches' knowledge of the community they represent the cultural straight jacket of low understanding is potentially removed and the students are opened up to the possibility that something they love to do might have some value beyond their own life worlds. The coaches model that idea and also provide a degree of understanding that makes the experience simultaneously culturally inclusive and expressive. This affects the relationship with the teacher also as it builds on the open-ness of the psychological environment and raises the status of the teacher as someone who can build such environments that allow the students to experience meaningful music making that is valued by their community.

The results of these interactions speak for themselves when the music making is observed. (Hear EXAMPLE 3: BNS.mp3) The quality of the music in this study as well as the personal and social change that has accompanied the program is continuing to escalate, gaining attention from state and federal government ministers. What is most apparent is that the characteristics of the teacher seem to fit those outlined in the earlier research. Whilst finding out that theory is confirmed is pleasing it is also worrying that we have managed to see what we wanted to see. Interestingly the teacher

researcher from a third site provided a “negative case analysis” which gave us more poignant data about the robustness of these characteristics. This teacher reported on an event where ‘at risk’ students in a similar secondary aged and demographic music program to use her words ‘went pear shaped’. The students erupted into violent arguments with coaches (some of whom are the same as the study site) and broke into fights resulting in one student jabbing another with a bass guitar and groups of students threatening to walk out. In a debriefing reflection with me the teacher reflected on her role as cultural manager as one where she was required to provide the psychological environment and the clear behavioral management structure that was needed and that coaches had little or no experience with these functions. At the time she had become a coach using her musicianship as a guide for groups of students rather than micro-managing all of the interactions. In a debriefing discussion we applied the checklist to revisit the program structure and outline the roles of the coaches and her own role.

A subsequent debriefing with students and coaches revealed the fragile character of the students and the importance of context even more. In this site students came from a variety of schools. The students were considered ‘at risk’ in terms of their social lives outside of school. The ‘authority’ of being in a school in the daytime when the rest of the school institutional structure functioned was not there as the rehearsals took place in an evening. We can see here the influence of context on the building of the psychological environment. The focus of the project was on providing a means of expression through music making to fragile adolescents, many with personal and social problems. The need for the teacher to engineer a safe environment and a successful one became even more important here given the students personal circumstances.

### **Critiquing the methodology**

Whilst this has been only preliminary observations and analysis both the teacher researchers and my own experiences of using creative case methodology and having access to the audiovisual data incredibly useful as a means of stimulated recall, as a clear documentation of the experiences from a number of perspectives. The process of editing short documentaries and making multimedia sites to display data was itself a creative act and allowed the creative voices and actions of both teachers and students to emerge in a compelling way that privileged the creative experience. In particular the recordings and DVD’s of the students’ songs have served as evidence-based advocacy for the program. These data when used in conjunction with statistical studies and other qualitative observations served directly to influence the principal and the state education authorities that the program was worth continuing. It is this kind of linkage of rigorous multi-method research and the use of digital technology that has been exciting for this project and will need further discussion and analysis over the length of the major study.

### **Conclusion**

From this brief research we can suggest that the teacher performs multiple roles to facilitate access through their relationship with community and the students. What is most apparent in this is the role of teacher as builder of context and as a manager of the cultural life of students. It is this notion of cultural management that needs to be built upon here. This study merely provides further evidence supporting an earlier description of the role of classroom music teacher. It does so from a unique classroom context which suggests that as the classroom context changes this definition of the characteristics of the teacher and the community is still robust. What is needed to extend this is to conduct further teacher and student interviews asking what it is they see as good teaching practice in these contexts or what they value in a teacher/ teaching relationship focusing upon teacher as manager of a child’s cultural life. What would be useful would be a database of teacher profiles using the characteristics outlined as a checklist or analytical tool drawing teachers from a broad range of contexts. Through this kind of research we can design frameworks for teacher

training which incorporate developing these qualities of altruism, inclusivity and cultural management (I. BROWN, 2002).

Beyond the focus of the study, the concept of creative case study and the employment of rich media and database strategies to document and analyse the research data shows promise as a methodology able to capture these more difficult aspects of the learning and teaching experience. Characteristics such as described in this study have a more multi dimensional representation when we can see and hear the effect of the teacher's relationship with students in the voices of the participants and their creative production. In particular, the idea of teacher as a manager of the cultural lives of students has more strength when we are able to experience the student's culture making and the teachers' design of the environment. As a teacher of music, I have often thought of myself as a composer of random algorithmic stochastic music. My lesson design is an algorithm, it has a strong probability of containing the core content I incorporate in the design and the randomness of the human element in the classroom ensures the outcomes will be different whilst the temporal nature of music lessons ensures a beginning and end. The teacher as a cultural manager designs environments where the student will encounter music experience and this experience is managed by a teacher-artist able to be sensitive to the needs of students and take into account the limitations and possibilities of the context.

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### **Media examples:**

- 1) BNS Summary documentary- Produced by Daniel Spirvoski.
- 2) RJM- Mp3 file recording of a song by the BNS band at Glenala State High School 2005.
- 3) BNS.mp3- 'I really Love you' Song composed and performed by BNS at Glenala State High School 2005 produced by Daniel Spirovski

- 4) SPIROVSKI, D. (2005): "Stories of transformation through meaningful music making  
Creative case link to media version of the article:  
<http://dmap.ci.qut.edu.au/Spin/hotarticle.htm>