

Developing the music pre-service teacher through international service learning

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Abstract

Service learning in tertiary education is about partnerships between higher education institutions and communities, as co-generators of knowledge. Arts programs in service learning engage what Rendon (2009) calls *sentipensante* (sensing/thinking) pedagogy, in which critical examinations of ways of thinking and doing sit alongside relational contemplative practices. This paper draws inspiration from this *sentipensante* pedagogical framework as well as principles of teaching in international contexts (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997), and uses both frames to examine the development of music pre-service teachers in the story of one young teacher and his supervising teacher. The young male teacher participated in international service learning in Penang, Malaysia. The paper sets out to highlight the benefit that such a case study can provide by critically examining the experiences of the pre-service teacher in the classroom and the community.

Key words: Arts-based service learning, pre-service music teaching, critical reflection.

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The University of Western Sydney service learning program

In the Master of Teaching Secondary Course, the program 'Professional Experience 3' (known as PE3) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) involves pre-service teachers completing 60 hours of work in a service learning context. Local partners include state government departments, non-government organisations and an array of educational and community sites, collaborating with pre-service teachers in co-constructing knowledge (Jameson, Clayton & Jaeger, 2010). In community service-learning projects, participants can come to understand the benefits of giving back to the communities in which they work whilst becoming critical thinking individuals (Molnar, 2010).

Each year up to 500 students complete a PE3 placement before beginning work as teachers.

Through written reflection, pre-service teachers learn to engage in critical self-monitoring as they attend to their learning experiences. They write their experiences and shape their professional identities as they develop and refine their teaching philosophy. Engagement with service learning has positive effects on pre-service teachers' sense of social responsibility, enabling them to work positively in a range of settings (Kahne, Westheimer & Rogers, 2000). Frequently, they utilise project-based learning, which has been found to be a powerful motivation for adolescents (Munns, Arthur, Downes, Gregson, Power, Sawyer, Singh, Thistleton-Martin & Steele, 2006). The PE3 program is distinctive in that it is embedded in a graduate entry program and is a mandatory unit of study, requiring pre-service teachers to reflect on their experiences, making reference to learning in a real context. The

university also offers international experiences and one of these is to Penang, Malaysia.

In Penang, the pre-service teachers are accommodated at Southeast Asian Minister of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Education in Science and Mathematics (RECSAM) in an arrangement that has been in place for eight years. They teach in schools that have been assigned by the Penang State Education Department (JPN) – the organisation that oversees school education. The school where Josh, a music pre-service teacher was assigned was SMK Bukit Jambul, where the music program is very performance-based and where music pre-service teachers have previously attended. The school is one that is called on to host official events such as the 2013 seminar for teachers in the official language, Bahasa Melayu, for which the school provided performances in traditional dance and song.

The pre-service teachers who apply to participate in the Penang program provide a detailed statement about their reasons for wanting to teach for a short time in another country. They also fund their own airfares and living expenses while there. RECSAM is the site of the budget university lodge-style accommodation through its International House and it provides morning and afternoon buses to and from the schools in which the pre-service teachers work. There is time provided for cultural sight-seeing, taking in the natural beauty of Penang Hill, the heritage of Georgetown and the beach area and night markets of Batu Ferringhi.

Research participants

Overseas professional experience has led to several papers (White, 2012; White & Ng, 2011; Power, 2012; Power & Dunbar-Hall, 2001). This case study of one pre-service music teacher and his supervisor is able to flesh out in more detail issues relating to the formation of teacher identity and to the learning that derives from an international context (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In doing so, it is hoped

that the paper will be of benefit to researchers, community members and policy makers interested in the application of this pedagogical approach (Stake, 2000).

In order to conduct the case study, ethical procedures (H10289) were completed to research 'Developing the music pre-service teacher through international service learning.' Pre-service teacher Josh and his supervisor at the school Hanne were invited to complete consent forms and had their responses to the Research interview protocols recorded. Interview questions are shown in appendices identified as Pre-Service 1 (PS1) and Teacher 1 (T1).

Gathering the stories

Thematic discourse analysis was selected to provide a detailed and nuanced account of themes where broader assumptions and meanings were seen to underpin what was articulated in the data. By interviewing Josh on three occasions during the Penang experience, it was possible to assess whether the service learning prepared him to organise, manage and prepare his classrooms in ways that improved outcomes for Malaysian students. Furthermore, the interviews prompted Josh in reflective learning and critical re-examination of world views, in line with the *sentipensante* pedagogy. The researcher used semi-structured interviews of one hour's duration to gather data and document Josh's experiences. These interviews were recorded and transcribed, giving him the opportunity to communicate his experience of the Penang program and offer his first-hand perspective.

All the pre-service teachers responded to a survey before the beginning of the international professional experience. The survey provided benchmark information about expectations of pre-service teachers' experiences including their ideas of working respectfully in this intercultural setting and their anticipated learning. During the experience, there were several afternoon debriefings, focusing on the events of the day

and the learning that had come from them. At the end of the professional experience, interviews with participants focused on their learning, their awareness of their school students' learning and the importance of cultural interaction. Josh's story is derived from these sources. Hanne's story is derived from one interview conducted in the second week of the professional experience. During the analysis of this data, two key themes emerged as significant: the role of music in the Bukit Jambul School and in Penang society generally; and performance practices by adolescent and adult musicians. Other related issues included the importance of taking account of prior learning and confidence in intercultural relationships.

Josh's story

After high school, Josh studied music at the Australian International Conservatorium of Music (AICM), completing a Bachelor of Music (Performance-Contemporary Jazz Piano). His piano teacher, Gavin Ahearn, was a jazz specialist, sharing his enthusiasm, modeling professional life through his jazz trio and helping students such as Josh begin to make professional contacts. Another strong influence was John Dip Salis, who was in his final year when Josh entered his degree at AICM. A Malaysian jazz pianist, he now performs in Kuala Lumpur at a jazz venue called 'No Black Tie' and was a key reason behind Josh's aim to experience teaching and performing in Malaysia. In Penang, Josh was invited to perform at a jazz Jam Session at the Chinahouse in Georgetown one weekend between his work at the school. Consequently, his experience gave him insight into both the educating of young musicians and the adult music scene in Penang.

At the school, Josh assisted in setting up performing ensembles, encouraging student performers in their rehearsal sessions, familiarising himself with the syllabus and helping to mark student work books. When he asked the students to sing for him, the boys sang

'Keranamu Malaysia' (which loosely translates as we love and are proud of Malaysia). The girls sang 'Rasa Sayang', a traditional Malay folk song. They sang unselfconsciously, led by a young student, Eskil, on guitar.

One of the differences from Australian students that Josh noticed was the confidence of young Malaysian males to sing solos and duets. The 14-16 year old students he taught had many students who loved singing. The instrumentalists included percussion, guitar, keyboard and violin. The guitarist was still learning chords for the songs his friends wanted to sing. He had picked up several chord sequences and would search for the lyrics of the songs and work out where the chord changes came. For the majority of students, their repertoire experience was in popular music and Josh's teacher, Hanne, encouraged Josh to deliver some lessons that demonstrated the differences between jazz and popular music. Josh enthusiastically prepared these lessons, searching out examples of singers and instrumentalists relevant to the class experience. He looked for musical examples by instrumentalists such as Bill Evans, to contrast with musical examples the students knew from artists as diverse as The Jackson 5 and Adele. Even seven years ago, Shah (2006) wrote that young Malaysians were growing up with musical knowledge limited to the types of music they were exposed to from the media and internet downloads.

While limited access to a wide variety of musics hinders the development of a musician, the imitation of Youtube clips is most likely to occur in a culture where music reading is not prioritised and the subject of music is not widely accepted in schools (Shah, 2006). Among the adult musicians, Josh realised that some of the musicians, especially the singers, who performed at the Chinahouse had learned their songs from YouTube performances. As evidence of this, one singer sang two songs by different artists (*Georgia on my Mind* that had been recorded by Ray Charles and *Besame Mucho* that had

been recorded by Andrea Bocelli). He had a very pleasant voice and was a crowd favourite at the venue. He not only projected differently in each song but his stance and gestures changed in imitation of the different singers. When Ray Charles sings, he has a very distinctive way of ducking his neck sideways. When blind Andrea Bocelli sings, he often closes his eyes to minimise the audience contact with any blank expression there. This singer at the Penang Chinahouse imitated both these gestures as part of the song. He made no attempt to interpret the songs himself but rather took on the persona of each singer as he sang the song they had made famous. The instrumentalists were affected less by watching other performers but Josh noticed that the drummer always cued people back into the head return, even when that was not necessary.

Josh was confronted by a very different cultural experience through these performances. Is this way of performing culturally acceptable? Is such a performance the result of a missing pedagogical step? Was he noticing this because his performance skill had been honed by regular performance practice occasions in his undergraduate degree in which student peers would provide feedback on performance aspects? How can critical reflection in order to improve and personalise a performance work in a culture alongside rote learning?

As a consequence of these observations, Josh prepared some guidelines for young school-aged performers. He based these on the framework of performance practice feedback, drawing out students to comment on specific features of someone else's performance such as rhythmic innovations or the way a singer might adjust the contour of a phrase to suit their vocal range more effectively. He sought to have them be creatively expressive rather than focus on music notation. He tried to encourage the young performers to understand that performances are unique and that the quality an audience enjoys is the personal expression of the performer.

This is in line with the Orff approach, in which action is driven by the strong belief that young learners should be taught as reflective practitioners, with learning that encompasses performing, listening and creating (Power, 2007). While the Orff-Schulwerk process uses imitation, it does so with the intention that it can be followed by consolidation and a period of internalising, leading to improvisation, creativity and performance. Is it possible to move from imitation to the later steps without the guidance of a teacher? Is the answer to be found through notation? Within the Western music tradition, reading notation is a significant tool but it is "not a prerequisite for successful engagement with and appreciation of music" (McPherson & Gabrielsson, 2002, p. 169). It is not "necessary to the construction, communication and conservation of music meaning" (Barrett, 2005, p. 117) as ethnic, popular, jazz and self-taught musicians regularly demonstrate (Mills & McPherson, 2006). Research suggests that "undue emphasis on staff notation can lead to the atrophy of musicians' creative abilities and their ability to memorise" (Mills & McPherson, 2006, p. 156).

As a teacher, Josh learned to appreciate differences in cultural knowledge. He realised that his planned lesson on comparisons between jazz and pop began with a reliance on prior learning that the students did not have and he made changes accordingly. He subsequently had the pleasure of seeing young musicians become familiar with another genre of music through his influence. His own learning as a musician was in balancing an ensemble that comes together spontaneously in a jam session. He also made international contacts as it is his intention to return to Malaysia to participate in the Asian jazz scene.

Hanne's Story

Hanne is the music teacher at Bukit Jumbal high School. She studied piano and accompanying from

Victor Kam Soo Tek, Head of Department in the music faculty of the Arts School at the University of Science Malaysia (USM). Hanne's knowledge of jazz came from being part of the USM jazz ensemble led by Madya Razif Mohd (affectionately known as Jeep). Her jazz background formed an immediate bond with Josh.

Her goal for Josh was for him to experience what the school and community offered musically during his time in Penang. Her experience as a music teacher has been strongly grounded in her USM years. By contrast a music teacher in a neighbouring school told me that she had trained as a primary teacher. When the government planned to implement the secondary music education curriculum (known as the 'Integrated Secondary School Curriculum') in 1996, it approached interested primary teachers in 1994 and gave them two years of training in choir, gamelan, strings and brass to equip them for the schools in which they would teach. This intensive training has produced good outcomes in selected schools but Hanne's teacher education was a more traditional degree structure. Hanne believes strongly in knowledge of musical styles, music notation and technical expertise to provide the basis of a stylistic musical performance.

At Bukit Jumbal, her goal was to provide school students with opportunities to perform. The Big Project was started from student interest about two years ago. Initially, Hanne invited students, as they commenced high school in Form One, to join the Project building on their experience of playing an instrument or singing. Now The Big Project has become well-known and students come to ask Hanne if she might listen to them. She arranges for the students to perform on stage at recess once a month. In these ways, when her school hosts an event Hanne knows who to ask to perform. She has several students aged 14 to 16 years who are very promising young musicians. Avanes and Shakir are two young baritones who sing popular melodies stylistically. Avanes loves to sing Lionel Ritchie's 'Hello' as this is a favourite

of his father. Alif is a developing guitarist. Nicholas, a violinist, and Joel, a pianist, are more classically oriented. Hanne's hope for them is that they continue to make music, even if their career path is not in performing.

Music performance is strong in the school. The families from which the students come are professional and they are ambitious for their children. Many students go on to university studies. Music will, she feels, most likely be seen as a hobby. That is a reflection of Penang society generally. There are no music stores where instruments or resources are available. The Georgetown Heritage Festival that took place during the time of the service learning experience involved music ensembles and dance displays. There were temporary stages set up in the streets of the town. So the social-history status of music is celebrated but the reality in many schools is different. In 2005, music (through the afore-mentioned Integrated Secondary School Curriculum) was offered in 130 schools throughout Malaysia (Bakhtiar, 2005). Data on numbers of schools in Malaysia in 2008 (UNESCO IBE, 2010-2011) lists some 2,221 schools. So this provides some understanding of the proportion of schools offering music in secondary school. Consequently, the development of music skills for the majority of young people tends to be through informal musical experiences.

With the Bukit Jumbal students at the USM performance for the teachers of Bahasa Melayu, Hanne was a calming presence backstage, helping the girl dancers with make-up and keeping the male musicians' energy levels up with conversation and chocolate. She said later: "When my students are performing, I always say to them it is not about winning an award or money prize (although the school shelves showed evidence of those achievements), it is about having fun, sharing your music with other people."

Music at the secondary level is mandatory for the first three years in schools "that were selected to provide music by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, or schools that opted to

provide music" (Shah, 2006 p. 135). At Bukit Jambul, there is a choir, gamelan ensemble and band. A neighbouring school has a bagpipe ensemble, gamelan ensemble, string ensemble and brass band. In these schools, performance is offered as a co-curricular activity alongside a classroom curriculum. These schools tend to be the exception rather than the norm.

With Josh during his period of time at the school, Hanne offered opportunities to try new activities as well as mentoring support. Speaking of Josh's development as a musician and a teacher, she said: "He is learning to pitch the lessons at the level of experience of the students. The Form Two class had not experienced different styles of jazz so the names of Swing and Bebop were new words for them. But the students readily recognised instruments and some performers." Hanne encouraged him to make his lessons with the class practical, beating out rhythm patterns on the floor, singing the melody of a piece and then being able to recognise improvisation on that melody when it occurred.

Potential impact of international arts-based service learning

This case study has drawn attention not only to the arts-based key themes outlined above, but also has illustrated the impact that reflection on service learning programs has on future teachers, their school students and the broader community. Related research has found that future teachers learn to adopt teaching strategies involving practical activities and give clear explanations and sufficient 'think time' for students to respond in class discussion (White & Ng, 2011). Canvassing student perceptions over the years in which the Penang experience has been offered has produced changes in the thinking of pre-service teachers planning for students where English was not the first language, to listen more and to allow the students to reveal what they know before 'teaching them' (White, 2012).

International studies have shown that intercultural service learning projects enable

students to have a dialogue with others in the world beyond themselves (Emmanuel, 2005), bringing a critical engagement with world politics, and a shift in their views of cultural diversity. Josh's reflections on teaching classes and re-examining of his worldviews demonstrate growing self-confidence with cultural interactions and resonate with Rendon's (2009) *sentipensante* pedagogy. At the same time, the experience of performing with adult musicians, some of whom imitated performers whose YouTube clips they had seen, caused him to re-assess what practices develop when there is an absence of critical reflection on learning.

As Chupp and Joseph (2010) concur, service learning projects such as this one, hinge on the development of mutually beneficial relationships between pre-service teachers, their students and the teachers with whom they work. While the duration of these relationships was limited to two weeks, these experiences still provided a powerful catalyst for the pre-service teacher to reflect on their own teaching practice. As the examples above have shown, through relationships with the students, the pre-service teacher came to appreciate the importance of giving encouragement, critiquing the cultural politics of their own educational experiences, showing vulnerability in the classroom, and connecting with others teachers and artists outside the school gate.

Closely aligned to this concept of relationship building is that of mutual learning. As this case study has outlined, there are opportunities for mutual learning, of benefit to school students, community members and participating pre-service teachers, offering genuine prospects for the furthering of knowledge and creativity. Indeed, the school students' growing confidence seemed to parallel an emerging sense of self-assuredness in the pre-service teachers, as they came to a greater understanding of themselves, their past experiences and perceptions, and their future role as educators.

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