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Nurturing the olive tree: scaffolding jazz pedagogy through spiral curricula from conservatoire to community and classroom

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Nurturing the olive tree: Scaffolding jazz pedagogy through spiral curricula from conservatoire to community and classroom

Long Abstract

“Nurturing the olive tree: scaffolding jazz pedagogy through spiral curricula from conservatoire to community and classroom” traces the music education curricula in a regional Australian university through undergraduate studies in jazz and contemporary music, to its application in pre-service teacher training, performance in professional and community music practice, dissemination through secondary music education provision, and its refinement when re-introduced to the conservatoire. The paper aligns with the International Society for Music Education’s (ISME’s) “Listening to the Music Diversity of the World” Conference aims to “contribute with the education of music teachers, of artists and of researchers” (ISME, 2012, home page), and responds to ISME’s Jazz Special Interest Group’s objectives to provide information for educators on how to teach jazz, inform ISME members about jazz and provide leadership in jazz (ISME, 2012, 1).

This research discusses a scaffold of jazz theory and musicianship underpinning the contemporary music education program, its extension in arranging and performance, the practical skill development of ensemble direction and conducting, application of these skills and knowledge in teacher training; and the associated pedagogy. The research investigates the development of these skills and knowledge through graduates’ engagement in professional practice and community music; and the integration of this knowledge and skills into their own pedagogy.

Allegory demonstrates the spiral curricula through the growth of an olive tree. The journey of Basia Trzetrzelewska's "An Olive Tree" specifically illustrates this concept, through its use as an educational resource for aural analysis to develop musicianship, then a compositional study for big band arranging, and finally performance repertoire for a professional big band. Music education pedagogy prepares the soil, the aim of this pedagogy is attaining graduate attributes – the established olive grove. Practice-based research methodology designs the garden. Musical seeds are planted through jazz theory studies and fertilised by musicianship training. The olive tree yields buds (compositional practice and arranging) which flower through musical performance. The discipline required in musical direction and conducting are represented as pruning to promote healthy growth. Pre-service music teacher education is like training the shoots. A bountiful harvest of professional practice and community music engagement ensues, which is shared as the musical practice and pedagogy disseminates throughout the community. Graduates working in teaching vocations plant a new crop. Creating new knowledge and repertoire through practice-based research shakes the tree of the music discipline. The conclusion recommends embracing these opportunities for lifelong learning, teaching and creative fulfilment.

Short Abstract

"Nurturing the olive tree: scaffolding jazz pedagogy through spiral curricula from conservatoire to community and classroom" traces music education curricula through undergraduate studies in jazz and contemporary music, to its application in pre-service teacher training, performance in professional and community music practice, dissemination through secondary music education provision, and its refinement when re-introduced to the conservatoire. Allegory demonstrates spiral curricula through the growth of an olive tree. Music education pedagogy prepares the soil, the aim of this pedagogy is attaining graduate

attributes – the established olive grove. Practice-based research methodology designs the garden. Musical seeds are planted through jazz theory studies and fertilised by musicianship training. The olive tree yields buds (compositional practice and arranging) which flower through musical performance. The discipline required in musical direction and conducting is represented as pruning to promote growth. Pre-service music teacher education trains the shoots. A bountiful harvest of professional practice and community music engagement ensues; shared as musical practice and pedagogy disseminates throughout the community. Graduates working in teaching vocations plant a new crop. Creating new knowledge and repertoire through practice-based research shakes the tree of the music discipline. The conclusion recommends embracing these opportunities for lifelong learning, teaching and creative fulfilment.

Key words

Jazz, pedagogy, spiral curricula, creative practice

Theoretical/pedagogical background – preparing the soil

“Nurturing the olive tree: scaffolding jazz pedagogy through spiral curricula from conservatoire to community and classroom” traces the music education curricula in a regional Australian university through undergraduate studies in jazz and contemporary music, its application in pre-service teacher training, performance in professional and community music practice, dissemination through secondary music education provision, and its refinement when re-introduced to the conservatoire. A spiral curricula is described by Harden, Davis and Crosby (1997) as:

an educational programme where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts ...

with its three interlocking phases ... themes running through the curriculum ... a core

curriculum with special study modules ... the educational strategies adopted, including elements of problem-based and community-based learning and approaches to teaching and learning that encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

The spiral curricula discussed in this paper is illustrated by the journey of an example of Latin jazz repertoire, Basia Trzetrzelewska's "An Olive Tree".

My pedagogy is situated in creative arts practice: combining jazz theory, musicianship, performance and arranging with music education pedagogy. This is underpinned by scholarship in teaching and learning, research in music education.

Aim of project/research reported – the olive grove

The paper aligns with the International Society for Music Education's (ISME's) "Listening to the Music Diversity of the World" Conference aims to "Promote the socialization and the debate of research and practices" and "contribute with the education of music teachers, of artists and of researchers" (ISME, 2012, home page). The paper responds to ISME's Jazz Special Interest Group's objectives to provide information for educators on how to teach jazz, inform ISME members about jazz and provide leadership in jazz (ISME, 2012, 1).

The research reported in this paper reveals the jazz theory and musicianship underpinning the contemporary music education program, its extension in arranging and performance, the practical skill development of ensemble direction and conducting, and the application of these skills and knowledge in teacher training. The paper also explains the teaching strategies practised to achieve these learning outcomes. The research then investigates the development of these skills and knowledge by professional musicians and music educators through their

professional practice in the music industry and community music engagement; and the integration of this knowledge and skills into their own pedagogy.

Method/approach of work – designing the garden

This research required a multi-methodological approach beginning with an autoethnographic study of my teaching practice, performance practice and compositional craft; similar to the approach described in Harrison (2012, 101), based on Schon's (1983) model of reflective practice and extended by Cowan's (1997) reflective loop: reflection for action. As Diamond (1992) states: "Autoethnographic procedures help in such critical retheorizing or transformation". Feedback from students and colleagues also informs this work. I conducted case studies observing student participation in university classes and peer participation in community music practice. "Caring and sensitive ethnography can assist teachers to act as their own stage managers and to produce polyphonic accounts of practice as co-learners" (ibid.). These action research methods were triangulated by literature about jazz pedagogy and music education pedagogy.

Summary

Jazz theory – planting the seeds

The contemporary music degree described in this study is founded on a core of first year of eight units including foundational studies in practical music (instrument or voice), contemporary music theory, musicianship, music technology and recording, and contemporary musicology.

The jazz journey begins with the second year unit *Contemporary Music Theory II*, where students study advanced contemporary music theory, extended and quartal harmony, groove

construction, sectional harmonisation, jazz chord vocabulary and chord voicings, voice leading, modes and jazz scales and their application for improvisation. Students are also provided with The New Real Book 1988, vi) chord vocabulary and a template of piano chord voicings. Standard groove styles for piano, bass and drums are also taught e.g. walking bass lines, drum and bass patterns for funk and Latin.

Assessments begin with spelling chords, writing short standard chord progressions in piano voicings and notating scales, modes and their diatonic extended chords. Tasks progress to groove construction for a rhythm section of piano, bass and drums over standard chord progressions in various contemporary genres. Later assessments involve writing melodies over chord progressions, applying scales and modes for improvisation, and two and three part sectional harmonisation of melodies. The final assessment includes adding horn section arrangements to rhythm and blues/funk songs and creating a horn arrangement over a jazz ballad bass. The success of this pedagogy is affirmed by formal student feedback rating student satisfaction with the unit as 4.28/5 and satisfaction with my teaching as 4.57/5. Comments attested: “She makes it so easy for everyone to understand” and “She has been able to ignite, in me, a passion for theory”.

Jazz musicianship – fertilising the plants

Second year students also study *Advanced Musicianship*, a unit designed to build students’ skills in chart writing, chart reading, aural perception and musical communication, underpinned by melodic, rhythmic and harmonic dictation. The major assignment consisted of transcribing the Basia song *An Olive Tree*: worked out by ear, notated in conductor’s score for voice, piano, bass, drums and trumpets, with correct performance articulation and dynamics. This exercise applied the theoretical knowledge and skills students learned in *Contemporary*

Music Theory II. This song exhibited additional musical elements studied in theory: tumbao bass lines, piano montunos, sectional harmonisation in horns, complex changing metres and the formal development of an extended arrangement.

Jazz arranging – buds in spring

The third year curriculum includes three qualifying units for training students as secondary school teachers. One of these units, *Advanced Studies in Western Art and Contemporary Music* contains two jazz-related composition assessments; arranging a contemporary song for four-part choir plus rhythm section, and arranging a jazz standard for big band. In the vocal arrangement students apply the voicing and voice leading principles and sectional arranging techniques they have studied in theory. Vocal arranging is supported by their study of classical four-part vocal harmony in the pre-requisite unit, *Studies in Western Art Music*. Students use their knowledge of groove construction to provide a stylistically authentic rhythm accompaniment.

The big band assignment requires arranging a jazz standard from a Real Book chart for five saxophones, three brass, and rhythm section of piano, guitar, bass and drums. This task extends students' skills in sectional writing techniques and jazz groove construction. The assignment also focuses on homophonic writing, textural balance, effective use of instrumental sections and timbres, plus dynamics and articulation. I created a sixteen-piece big band arrangement of Basia's "An Olive Tree" to prepare students for this assignment and provided an analysis of arranging techniques used, which featured four-part sectional harmonisation, octave doubling of clave-type ostinati, sectional antiphony, and chord stabs for rhythmic and harmonic punctuation.

Jazz ensemble performance – flowers in summer

Throughout second and third year, students undertake specialist instrumental or vocal studies. Individual, studio and workshop classes in their instrument are supported by ensemble classes. The ensemble program covers a diversity of musical genres, with a strong focus on rhythm and blues, funk and jazz. The harmonic and rhythmic knowledge learned in theory increases their understanding of the chord vocabulary and helps them interpret the rhythmic characteristics of these genres. Playing in ensemble also provides opportunity for students to correctly apply the advanced scales and modes they have studied when improvising. Ensemble classes a valuable entry into jazz repertoire and performing with correct stylistic nuances.

Musical direction and conducting – pruning for growth

Ensemble Direction and Arranging is a third year unit designed to develop the practical skills in performance, arranging, conducting and musical direction needed by secondary school music teachers. This unit builds on the arranging skills previously taught by including an assignment that requires orchestrating and arranging a piece of popular or film music repertoire for orchestra.

Conducting and ensemble direction form the practical focus of this unit. The whole-of-class ensemble rehearses and performs set works, while individual students take turns managing the rehearsal and conducting. Preparatory conducting and score reading exercises prepare students for this task. The final exam requires students to provide an arrangement for small ensemble, direct its rehearsal and conduct a successful performance of the piece. Formal student feedback attests to the success of this pedagogy with ratings of 4.6/5 for the unit and 4.9/5 for my teaching. One student identified valuable learning outcomes: “The final

examination was a great learning curb ... This practical activity exponentially increased my sight reading, ensemble direction skills and arranging skills as well as showed me where my gaps were”.

Music education – training the shoots

The third year units described above have a strong focus on developing the vocational skills needed to arrange for school choirs, ensembles and orchestras; and to perform in, conduct and direct a variety of ensembles. Students apply these skills during education practicum and pre-service internship. They report that this experience is made much less daunting by the training received in *Ensemble Direction and Arranging*, as they can confidently assist in running rehearsals, conducting large groups, training choirs and producing performances for school concerts.

The *Ensemble Direction and Arranging* class is also trained as a four-part choir, which develops students’ sight singing, aural perception, vocal skills and choral conducting. The choir performs some of the vocal arrangements students composed in *Advanced Studies in Western Art and Contemporary Music*. Reinforcing a composition task with a performance outcome is a very successful strategy. Students loved performing their own works and stated that the performance activity improved their understanding of the compositional process. This strategy demonstrates the spiral curricula, where each encounter with the subject matter develops deeper levels of learning.

Professional practice and community engagement – harvest in autumn

My teaching is underpinned and informed by years of professional practice as a solo artist, pianist in jazz bands and double bassist in community orchestras. My current position as

pianist in a regional big band further develops my skills in sight reading, ensemble playing, improvisation, stylistic interpretation and rhythmic nuance. Using our rehearsals and concerts as case studies, my skills of conducting and musical direction are refined.

The big band has recently commenced rehearsals of my arrangement of *An Olive Tree*. The learning challenges presented by this difficult arrangement include its fast tempo, authentically interpreting Latin jazz style by players more comfortable with swing, changing metres, playing in extreme registers, stamina to play through the long arrangement at high velocity and fast tempo, and musical cohesion for the band to keep together throughout its changing formal structure. By creating original contemporary resources for the band and helping to advise on the practise and interpretation of their parts, my compositional practice and educational pedagogy extends into a broader professional music community.

Jazz pedagogy disseminated in community- sharing the fruit

The big band membership comprises professional musicians, mature-career music teachers, mid-career music teachers, beginning music teachers, some students enrolled in the music course at my university, and one promising high school student. All the members specialise in performance on their particular instrument and most teach, either secondary music education and/or private studio practice. All report how much they continue to learn through participation in this ensemble, which they attribute to the challenging selection of repertoire, rigorous rehearsal management by the musical director, attention to detail in difficult parts of scores, and the general ethos of the membership to attain high levels of performance. The attraction of this community-based music education is affirmed by requests from other musicians to join the band; acknowledging the steep learning curve this would entail. The big band has a dedicated following who regularly attend concerts. By providing this cultural

service, jazz education and musical appreciation is disseminated throughout the wider community.

Jazz pedagogy disseminated in classroom – plants for next season

Several of the big band members are graduates from the university music course whom I have taught. Our former teacher-student relationship has developed into a collegial interaction of peers, where we are co-learners in shared musical practice. These graduates are now music educators, disseminating the knowledge and skills they learned at university into secondary school music programs and private instrumental studios; taking their turn to sow the seeds of music education in our next generation of learners. Their pedagogy is also informed by their engagement in professional practice and community music. A significant network of alumni seeks my assistance in managing classroom situations, requests for resources, support for career decisions and advice regarding post-graduate study. The spiral curricula now extends into professional and vocational practice and higher degree education.

Jazz pedagogy disseminated through research – shaking the tree

“Nurturing the olive tree: scaffolding jazz pedagogy through spiral curricula from conservatoire to community and classroom” responds to ISME’s Jazz Special Interest Group’s objectives to provide information for educators on how to teach jazz, inform ISME members about jazz and provide leadership in the area of jazz (ISME, 2012, 1). Music educators have regular opportunities to observe the learning processes of students and the outcomes of their own pedagogy. These opportunities are triangulated through rich learning environments provided by professional music practice and community music engagement. The research potential of these environments can be enhanced by compositional practice. By interrogating one’s pedagogy through their daily teaching and maintaining one’s professional

practice, the musician's lifestyle actually reflects a methodology that frames practice-based research. Continued participation in creative activities forms a teaching/learning/research nexus whose outcomes can be disseminated to improve music education and inform non-jazz musicians and educators about teaching and playing jazz.

Conclusions and implications for music education – hug an olive tree

“Hug an olive tree, I take it things are looking good, still could be better
There's always something to improve, oh yes we should”. (Robinson, Trzetrzelewska,
White, 1994).

This paper traces the spiral curricula that begins in an undergraduate university music course, develops through second and third year specialised music study, is applied in the vocational environment of teacher training, practised in the broad landscape of professional and community music practice, integrated into secondary school music programs and renewed on its re-entry into the conservatoire. The teacher and students encounter the subject matter of jazz musical vocabulary, repertoire, compositional craft and performance techniques at increasingly complex levels as they progress through the educational spiral. The spiral is strongly supported by vertical integration throughout the curricula and horizontal integration across university course units and/or across post-university professional music activities.

The role of the music educator changes through different levels of the spiral curricula: teaching in conservatoire, providing support in practicum, mentoring graduates as they begin careers, collegiality with peers sharing music making, advocacy and engagement in the community and industry, disseminating knowledge through practice-based research, and leadership in curriculum renewal and policy advice when the spiral recommences in the

conservatoire. To jazzers, musicians and music educators, and those ISME members who seek to learn more about playing and teaching jazz, I say “hug an olive tree” – it can grow into a garden of lifelong learning, teaching and creative fulfilment.

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