

Guided By Voices

Living and Learning Music

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

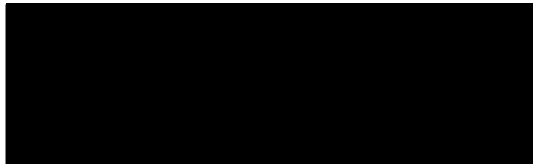
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College of Education

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Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

I, Gregory Aronson, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'Guided By Voices: Living and Learning Music' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or



diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

September 2016

Abstract

In my role as a music educator I have observed that students experience significant challenges, and even disengagement and disillusionment, as they attempt to negotiate tertiary music study. This study aims therefore to explore the music backgrounds and learning experiences of music students undertaking tertiary music study at VU in order to evaluate *why* students might not be enjoying their time at university as much as they perhaps ought to be.

This study takes place in the context of a 'University of Opportunity'. Victoria University (VU) conceptualises itself as an accessible educational provider offering learning opportunities for students from a range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. In an age of increasing competition and complexity in the tertiary education sector, issues of student attraction and retention dominate the landscape, leading to an increase in wide reaching, data driven, internal and external quality assurance monitoring. Whilst such quantitative investigations and evaluations undoubtedly assist in comprehending the strengths, weaknesses and challenges for the sector, and individual institutions such as VU, they do not clearly explain the specific and idiosyncratic experiences of music students at a 'University of Opportunity'.

There are substantial gaps in qualitative inquiry generally, and more specifically qualitative inquiry into tertiary music education. There is a need for greater emphasis on, and elucidation of, story, habitus and voice in tertiary music teaching and learning. Narratives emanating from a small, personal and local music education context such as the music department at VU can help to build understanding of how our students engage with and learn music. This body of work responds to calls from respected researchers such as Lucy Green for instances of specific, micro inquiries in the music education field. The approach taken in this study also contrasts to generalised commentary driven by quantitative analysis that struggle to explain the idiosyncratic complexities that arise for students who come from lower SES backgrounds. This is particularly important given that the majority of this quantitative research has taken place in first tier/choice universities.

The thesis aims therefore to listen to, understand and contextualise these experiences. I employ a multi method inquiry within the qualitative research framework, involving focus groups and in depth interviews to capture student experiences growing up and living in a range of music communities and their perceptions of learning music in a tertiary institution. These narratives are situated within the author's own ethnographies drawn from experiences as a musician, music educator and researcher. The voices that tell these stories *guide* the discussion and recommendations within this thesis. Ethnographic and narrative strategies of inquiry are employed within the context of agency and powerlessness in community and educational fields. Autoethnographic investigation occurs within the paradigm of critical self-reflection providing 'teachable moments' (Havighurst, 1953) in order to emphasise the complex, personal and atemporal nature of learning and investigation.

Findings detail stories about the communities that nurtured young musicians and instigated musical journeys showing a complex interplay between choice, agency, belonging and learning that young people experience in the negotiation of community fields. Participant experiences of learning music at university evince a wide range of challenges. These 'tensions' manifest as powerlessness, anxiety and disconnection with music learning and doing. Challenges are linked to imbalances between performative music function, or practice, and traditions of formulaic doxa in tertiary music education. Participants struggle for agency within confining and passive notions of 'legitimacy' within institutional contexts that often call for *reproduction* (as opposed to *production*). In contrast, findings also elicit a number of positive, or release, aspects. Findings show that participants are able to question and disrupt social and educational restrictions and contribute to conditions that allow for their musical and educational backgrounds and choices to be acknowledged and celebrated. Participants are able to call for legitimacy and autonomy and build valuable music skills and knowledge. Findings point to the benefits of building community characteristics within formal music curricula and pedagogy. Finally, findings articulate how participants value the opportunity to tell their deeply personal and different stories and acknowledge the importance of voice in more clearly understanding the 'student experience'.

Discussion draws on literature from the fields of education, music education and sociology. Analysis utilises cultural theory lenses, most notably drawing on the concepts of habitus, capital and field to understand participant experiences. Discussion contextualises challenges and successes in music communities and tertiary music fields via the fundamental notions of choice, growth, powerlessness, agency and well-being. Discussion additionally interrogates the role and emphasis of form, function, production and reproduction in the practice and learning of music.

The thesis concludes that genuine and substantive conversations between students and educators can lead to more effective student learning and a greater sense of inclusion, legitimacy and well-being. There is a paramount need to seek out, to listen and understand the background, nature and thinking of music students *and to be guided by all of the voices* involved in living and learning music. Teaching and learning that is deliberately and comfortably participatory leads to greater power and enfranchisement in all involved and can lead to a more harmonious union between the substantially functional habitus of musicians and the often formulaic dynamics of formal tertiary music contexts.

This exploration has prompted an important reminder that the fundamental aim of tertiary music education is to create conditions where individuals flourish, engage and create, and particularly so within the growing prevalence of rationalist, neo-liberal cultures that increasingly drive tertiary education policy and practice. Educators and institutions can, and indeed should, do better for the students they are tasked with educating. We need to be fair and ethical practitioners, and strive to make real improvements to what music students do and how they learn.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the 28 Victoria University music and music education students for so willingly sharing their stories of living and learning music with me. This thesis would not have been possible without the many candid and engaging conversations I had with them. These participants have provided a compelling insight into the vast range of backgrounds and learning experiences of people engaged in the music realm and are a lasting reminder of the importance of listening to and understanding the people we teach and learn with.

The experiences and stories that underpin the content of this thesis took place in the music programs at Victoria University. I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to work with many highly talented, engaging and supportive musicians and teachers over the last sixteen years. I would like to acknowledge the many sessional music staff at Victoria University who provided countless opportunities to discuss emerging ideas and approaches as I conceived and conducted this research. I would particularly like to mention Kiernan Box, Jonathan Zion, Catrina Seiffert, Fran Swinn and Darren Reston who have offered ongoing insight about music education and music students. I am indebted to Adam Hutterer and Stephen Rando for their collegiality, support and friendship. And I would particularly like to thank Robert Bell for his sage advice to me in all matters academic and musical and for his tireless work in, and dedication to, the music programs at Victoria University, allowing me space and time to complete this body of work.

I am grateful for the support provided by The College of Education at Victoria University. Heartfelt thanks must go to my thesis supervisors, Maureen Ryan and Marcelle Cacciattolo. I am truly fortunate to have had two such kind, generous, intelligent and patient mentors to guide me through this journey. The support they provided as I strived to balance work, family, music, life and study was unwavering, always positive and left me feeling like a valued and valuable human being. Maureen and Marcelle stand as powerful examples of truly effective and caring tertiary researchers, teachers and supervisors.

My dear children Joshua, Rebecca, Eliza and Abigail have all continued to grow and change as I worked away at this thesis. I have tried to be there with and for them as far as possible but I'm sure at times I have been grumpy at interruptions or have missed some small but important landmark. And so I thank them for putting up with me with their (at times, toothless) grins, playing with and looking after one another and lastly, for remembering to knock when they knew I was struggling with a particularly tricky bit of thinking or writing...

Finally, I am truly indebted to my darling wife, Deirdre for her unqualified love and support in all that I attempt as a musician, teacher and researcher. She has provided me the perfect reasoned and steady counsel when I have waived and has reminded me in deed and word that life is wonderful, even when dark clouds gather.

Table of contents

Chapter 1. Prelude	1
1.1. Story and voice	1
1.2. The local and global in music education: A contextual overview.....	2
1.2.1. A brief chronology of music education at Victoria University.....	2
1.2.2. Victoria University and the wider tertiary environment	4
1.3. Research questions and outline of chapters	9
Chapter 2. There is method in my madness: An autoethnography of a methodology	14
2.1. Prelude.....	14
2.2. Field of Inquiry	15
2.3. The investigative paradigm	24
2.4. Strategy of inquiry	31
2.5. Methods of collection and analysis	34
2.6. Ethics	41
2.7. Interpretation and evaluation.....	46
2.8. Coda: Concluding remarks.....	48
Chapter 3. Time remembered: Participant music backgrounds	50
3.1. Prelude.....	50
3.2. Music experiences prior to Victoria University.....	50
3.2.1. Family and the home	51
3.2.2. Religious communities and organisations	52
3.2.3. Community music programs	53
3.2.4. School music activities	53
3.2.5. Private music lessons	54
3.2.6. Bands and band scenes	55
3.2.7. Other music exploration	56
3.3. Definitions and descriptions of music communities.....	57

3.3.1. Religious communities	57
3.3.2. High School music communities	59
3.3.3. Community music programs	61
3.3.4. Melbourne's music communities	61
3.4. Benefits of belonging to a music community	64
3.4.1. Belonging and identity	64
3.4.2. Acceptance	66
3.4.3. Support	66
3.4.4. Confidence, self-worth and achievement	67
3.4.5. Friendship and music	68
3.4.6. Interest in music	69
3.5. Learning in music communities	70
3.5.1. Music	70
3.5.2. Music Industry Skills	72
3.5.3. The musical self	73
3.6. Challenges and disappointments in music communities	74
3.6.1. Musical and cultural attitudes	74
3.6.2. Lifestyle issues in music communities	75
3.6.3. Self-confidence, stress and anxiety	76
3.6.4. Limited learning opportunities in school communities	77
3.6.5. Challenged by others' musical skills or attitudes	80
3.6.6. Music challenges	82
3.6.7. Leaving music communities	82
3.7. Pathways to Victoria University	83
3.7.1. Learning more about music	83
3.7.2. Positive impressions of Victoria University	84
3.7.3. Recommendations for Victoria University	86

3.7.4. Spiritual guidance	87
3.7.5. Music and education	88
3.7.6. Career change	89
3.8. Coda: Concluding comments	90
Chapter 4. Studying music at Victoria University	91
4.1. Prelude.....	91
4.2. Positives of studying music at Victoria University	91
4.2.1. Units of study	91
4.2.2. Specific music skills attained.....	95
4.2.3. Teachers.....	97
4.2.4. Effective teaching.....	98
4.2.5. Music courses structure and content	102
4.2.6. Friendship and support	103
4.2.7. Relevance	104
4.2.8. Facilities, resources and locations	106
4.3. Challenges of studying music at Victoria University	107
4.3.1. Skills deficits	107
4.3.2. Confidence, belonging and self-worth.....	109
4.3.3. Student attitudes.....	111
4.3.4. Specific units.....	115
4.3.5. Teaching.....	117
4.3.6. Transition from TAFE to Higher Education music study.....	119
4.3.7. Time for learning and the work/life balance	122
4.3.8. Meeting music course expectations	123
4.3.9. Student background and interests	126
4.3.10. Facilities.....	127
4.3.11. University decisions affecting study experiences	128

4.4.	Community and music at Victoria University	132
4.5.	Improving music study at Victoria University	136
4.5.1.	Course selection	137
4.5.2.	Aspects of the course	137
4.5.3.	Teaching	140
4.5.4.	Course and institution suitability for students	141
4.5.5.	Facilities	142
4.6.	Student voices	142
4.7.	Coda: concluding comments	144
Chapter 5.	Let me you tell you a story: music education vignettes	145
5.1.	Question and answer	145
5.2.	What's the matter with Gillian?	148
5.3.	All that Jazz	149
5.4.	Eat your greens	152
5.5.	Did you hear the one about the drummer?	153
5.6.	The DJ	154
5.7.	The party	155
5.8.	My (not so) funny valentine	156
5.9.	I just don't get it	159
5.10.	It's a long road	161
5.11.	The student lounge	162
5.12.	Above and beyond	164
5.13.	The juggler	166
Chapter 6.	Home is where the (musical) heart is: music backgrounds	169
6.1.	Prelude	169
6.2.	Analytical lenses	170
6.2.1.	Limitations of a cultural theory lens and the distinctiveness of this research ..	175

6.3.	Development of habitus and the accrual of music capital	177
6.3.1.	Conditioned agency and the process of legitimisation	178
6.4.	Autonomy, belonging and function in informal music communities	180
6.4.1.	Autonomy and Identity	180
6.4.2.	Social capital, action and inclusion	181
6.4.3.	Enjoyment, engagement and informal learning.....	182
6.4.4.	Concluding remarks on informal music communities	184
6.5.	Engagement, satisfaction and autonomous learning in organised music communities	185
6.5.1.	Concluding remarks on organised music communities	187
6.6.	Inclusion, well-being, identity and the role and function of music in religious communities	187
6.6.1.	Support and belonging.....	187
6.6.2.	Enjoyment and well being	189
6.6.3.	Agency and identity.....	190
6.6.4.	Concluding remarks on the religious community field	191
6.7.	Form, function, agency and the accrual of cultural capital in secondary High School music programs.....	194
6.7.1.	Music capital and community characteristics in High School music programs	194
6.7.2.	How NOT to do music education: challenges in High School music programs	197
6.7.3.	Concluding remarks on the secondary music education field	198
6.8.	Coda: Contrasting and reassessing habitus and capital in community and secondary institutional music fields	200
Chapter 7. Tension: challenges in negotiating tertiary music education		201
7.1.	Prelude.....	201
7.1.1.	Consonance and dissonance.....	203
7.2.	Transition into the Vocational Education music.....	204
7.2.1.	The practical habitus of participants transitioning into Vocational Education ..	204
7.2.2.	Limited cultural (music) capital.....	206

7.2.3. Form and music capital in the Vocational Education music field.....	208
7.2.4. Measuring music performance.....	209
7.2.5. Social dynamics	210
7.2.6. Challenges with student attitudes	211
7.2.7. Concluding comments	214
7.3. Transition into Higher Education music.....	215
7.3.1. Low cultural (music) capital.....	216
7.3.2. Practical and limited musical habitus	217
7.3.3. Anxiety, limited personal agency and institutional power	219
7.3.4. Concluding comments	220
7.4. Vocational Education to Higher Education music.....	221
7.4.1. Limited cultural (academic and music) capital.....	221
7.4.2. Practical habitus developed in Vocational Education field	223
7.4.3. Agency and institutional power	225
7.5. Experiences across the cohorts	231
7.5.1. Habitus in the negotiation of formal music education fields	232
7.5.2. The role of form in institutional music education fields.....	237
7.5.3. Legitimation in formal music education fields	241
7.5.4. Power dynamics in the institutional environment	246
7.6. Coda: concluding comments.....	252

Chapter 8. Release: successful negotiations and disruptions in tertiary music education

254

8.1. Prelude.....	254
8.2. Voicing the Habitus	258
8.2.1. Prelude: the value of voicing story	258
8.2.2. Exploring habitus in (my) stories	260
8.2.3. Further discussion.....	263

8.2.4. Concluding comments on voicing the habitus	264
8.3. Enjoying growth and agency	265
8.4. Achieving release through teaching and learning	269
8.4.1. Accommodating the functional habitus	270
8.4.2. Agency through practice	272
8.4.3. Developing identity and well-being through performance	273
8.4.4. Accruing theoretical and academic skills	274
8.4.5. Agency and self-identity in music making	276
8.4.6. Legitimacy via learning	278
8.4.7. Effective learning conditions	280
8.4.8. Relevance	283
8.4.9. Flourishing through effective music pedagogy	284
8.5. The role of a music education community	287
8.6. Coda: Concluding comments	293
Chapter 9. Coda: Conclusions and recommendations	295
9.1. Prelude	295
9.1.1. Research questions, aims and methodology	295
9.1.2. Questions and aims	295
9.1.3. Methodologies used	296
9.2. Summary of findings	297
9.2.1. The habitus of Victoria University music students	297
9.2.2. Tensions in the music student experience	297
9.2.3. Releases in the music student experience	298
9.2.4. Local stories/global context	298
9.3. Reflexivity and ethnographic enquiry	299
9.4. Recommendations for tertiary music education	300
9.4.1. Prelude	300

9.4.2. Acknowledging and accommodating the functional student habitus	302
9.4.3. Space and time	304
9.4.4. Discovering the student habitus	305
9.4.5. Learning to value musical knowledge	307
9.4.6. Agency and autonomy	308
9.4.7. Well-being	311
9.4.8. Belonging and inclusion in communities	312
9.4.9. Resilience and Confidence	313
9.4.10. Flourishing	314
9.4.11. Acceptance and legitimacy	314
9.4.12. Identity	315
9.5. Coda and outro: Final remarks.....	316
References	317
Appendix 1. Participant information	326
Appendix 2. Music references	329

Explanatory note on listening

I have compiled a music playlist designed to accompany the reading of this thesis. Each sub chapter begins with a piece of music and that illustrates the literary themes raised in that section. The playlist is accessible at:

<https://open.spotify.com/user/1240534164/playlist/1UqdjiAKAnL82ZUcCW6qnK>

This link directs readers to the music streaming site, Spotify. To listen to the playlist readers are required to sign up to a (free) account in the site. Readers can listen to the music pieces either in the order presented or choose their own order. Each song title is also a hyperlink to the track in the Spotify playlist, so readers can click and listen as they read. If readers do not wish to listen through Spotify, the music references are listed in playlist order in Appendix 2.

Chapter 1. Prelude

1.1. Story and voice

'What can we do but listen to stories wretched or glorious?'

['Cold to see clear'](#)

[Nada surf](#)

I heard that one of my students, Matthew had become homeless and was sleeping on a friend's lumpy couch. He'd missed a few weeks of classes but apparently was still gigging almost every night with his band. The last time I saw him at university he'd performed a haunting song he'd written about losing his sense of purpose. The song had achingly personal lyrics and a beautiful meandering melody line. One of his mates told me he'd been struggling with anxiety and depression. I'd suspected something like that but he hadn't mentioned it to me. I'd wondered where he was because he'd really seemed interested in the course, although he'd missed a few assignments and was sometimes late or absent from class. I recalled that during his audition for the course he'd talked about his disappointments with High School and how he'd hoped studying music at university would be different and better. Matthew had left a CD of his band's music with me. I had a quick listen and immediately recognised a musician and songwriter with potential. We'd offered him a place and I'd hoped that he would enjoy the course and flourish. Now I wonder if we'll see him again...

The story represents a common refrain. So many of the voices I hear sing of a passion for music and yet so many of the students I have come across appear to struggle with tertiary music study. The question 'why?' has grown louder in my mind over my years as a university music teacher. It reached a crescendo several years ago during a late afternoon session at a music education conference. Listening to other music educators speak passionately and persuasively about the future of tertiary music I finally realised I needed to ask the question. I needed to understand who my students were and where they had come from? I wanted to know what they struggled with at university and why? I wanted to hear what they wanted and needed and how we might work

together to make things better. I realised there would be multiple and complex stories. But I became eager to hear their personal, individual and idiosyncratic stories, each detailing different backgrounds in music making and learning. I looked forward to listening to their stories about coming to Victoria University to study music.

This inquiry has provided the opportunity to listen to the voices of 28 students studying music at Victoria University. The stories involve music experiences of the students prior to entering formal music study at university and the challenges and successes encountered during their university study. I have come to know their strengths, desires, preferences, struggles and ideas and as a result I have come to realise the immense value of hearing and understanding these stories. Along the way I have also had the opportunity to explore my own voice as a music educator and researcher. This was important because it allowed me to contextualise my own experiences along with those of my students. In this thesis, our stories of tertiary education come together to bring a multitude of student and academic voices to the foreground. In showcasing, making public and critiquing the narratives that follow, opportunities for understanding and growth emerge.

1.2. The local and global in music education: A contextual overview

'Some things are big and some things are small'

['Some things are big', Guided by Voices](#)

1.2.1. A brief chronology of music education at Victoria University

I offer this brief history of music at Victoria University (VU) to orientate the reader to the historical and physical contexts that frame the stories that are presented.

VU has offered various music courses since 1999. A Vocational Education (VE) Certificate IV and a Diploma in music were originally offered in a makeshift music facility set up at the Sunbury campus. A partnership with Melba Conservatorium saw the development of a Higher Education (HE) Bachelor of Music degree in 2001 focusing on contemporary and popular music. This degree was originally a 'nested' qualification; offering a two year VE diploma

course acting as the equivalent of a first year of the music degree which then articulated into years two and three of the degree. VE and HE courses shared facilities and staff and were structured and administered by the relative VE and HE sectors within the university. This organisational context provided a number of opportunities and challenges, some of which are touched upon in the stories of the participants in this study.

In 2005 an HE Bachelor of Music Technology was added to the music offerings at VU. At the same time a successful proposal was put forward to design and construct a purpose built music facility on the heritage listed Sunbury Asylum site. Works were completed in 2007. The VE and HE music courses ran successfully for a further two years until, in 2009, a university wide restructure saw both Bachelors of Music courses discontinued and the entire Sunbury music campus closed. VE music was moved to temporary facilities at the Footscray Nicholson campus, while HE music staff moved to the St Albans campus as part of the Faculty of Arts. There a major specialisation in music was developed and offered as part of the Bachelor of Education and the newly created Bachelor of Creative Arts Industries. Limited facilities were developed to deliver the units within the specialisation.

In 2010 VU music staff approached Kindred Music Studios in Yarraville with the hope of using some of their music spaces for the delivery of practical music subjects. A partnership agreement and lease between Kindred and VU was eventually negotiated and signed in 2011. Specialist music education facilities were undertaken as part of the leasing agreement and completed in 2014. In 2012 the decision was made to design a new three year Bachelor of Music degree and the course was approved for delivery first in 2013. In this year a pathway for students achieving a successful completion of the VE Advanced Diploma course was developed. This enabled students to transition into the second year of the music degree. In 2014 HE music moved from the St Albans campus to the Footscray Park campus and Kindred Studios. At the time of writing this thesis approximately 120 students are enrolled in the Bachelor of Music course with about 40 students undertaking the VE Advanced Diploma in Music.

And now a little bit about me. I have always been a keen musician. I enjoyed playing in the school orchestra and singing in the High School choir as well as performing and writing in several bands in Australia and the United Kingdom. Like many of the participants in this research I had been drawn to music study and the potential of a career in music education. I joined the music department at Sunbury in 2002 as a sessional VE music teacher, having completed a BA and a post graduate diploma of education. I became involved with the establishment of the Bachelor of Music and was employed in 2003 as a part-time course coordinator by Melba Conservatorium and part-time VE music teacher by VU. I continued with these dual roles until 2009 when the partnership with Melba was discontinued and I gained a lecturing position within the Faculty of Arts at VU. I became a full time HE music lecturer and coordinator in 2011. I have enjoyed the challenges and opportunities in music education at VU and, in particular, teaching and working with hundreds of musicians over the years.

1.2.2. Victoria University and the wider tertiary environment

Victoria University is a self-described 'University of Opportunity'. VU this year celebrates a century of tertiary education established via various prior incarnations. However VU is in fact a relatively new 'university', gaining that status in 1991. During my 15 years at VU there have been three changes to senior management with accompanying mission statements and strategic plans. Each regime has employed their own idiosyncratic tones, but the university has continued to conceptualise itself as an accessible provider of tertiary educational opportunities for students from a diverse range of socioeconomic and academic backgrounds. The university continues to offer courses in both Vocational and Higher Education. Around 20-25% of students arrive at VU from low SES backgrounds and many represent the first in their family to attempt tertiary education.

Federal government policy initiatives such as uncapped university places and the extension of HELP loans to the vocational sector has produced an increasingly complex and challenging wider tertiary education landscape in Australia. Coupled with current debates around fee de-regulation and the 'need' for competition within the tertiary education sector there are financial

viability and sustainability issues at play. Current calls for cuts to tertiary education funding due to federal government budget 'blow-outs' add further uncertainty and hurdles for tertiary institutions and students alike. Competition between, and within, universities has increased as institutions have conceptualised strategic planning around a growth in student numbers. Commonwealth funds that accompany students and their tertiary placements also create complex issues of student retention and attrition. Student satisfaction with their university experience has become increasingly important within the university sector as institutions strive to maintain and grow revenue.

Tertiary education in Australia has thus far struggled to identify a united voice (nor indeed to raise it to a sufficient volume) and present a persuasive narrative around the necessary conditions of a vibrant, accessible and equitable university sector. This Australian story mirrors 'the focus on 'efficiency' and other such 'accountability metrics' and 'deliverables' (which has) has over the last decade become the new watchword of higher education' (Denzin and Giardina, 2015, p. 10). Perhaps in part, driven by the increasing frequency and persuasiveness of the elements of competition within the educational field, tertiary institutions in Australia have become fragmented into hierarchical 'groups'. This fragmentation is largely delineated by a drive for universities to have a status of prestige and high intellectual public standing. The lack of a coherent and cohesive voice risks further disparity within the sector and exposes tertiary education in Australia more generally to perceptions of inequality and reduced qualitative outcomes, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

As a lower tier 'university of opportunity' VU has faced particular challenges in areas such as attraction, retention and attrition in this daunting environment (Gabb, 2006). A relatively larger proportion of lower SES students and students transitioning to university with poor or patchy academic backgrounds has provided specific difficulties in ensuring students 'stay the course' and succeed. These coalescent challenges for a significant percentage of the VU student cohort have driven a great deal of exploration and thinking around the broad topics of 'retention, transition and success'. VU has published a range of quantitative (and to a far lesser extent, qualitative) research in these areas to

identify student challenges in transition and to help inform policy and practice in teaching and learning (e.g. Milne et al., 2006, Gabb, 2006, Messinis et al., 2009). VU investigation into student retention and success has also been informed by wider research (Devlin and O'Shea, 2011, Nelson et al., 2012). The research points to the need for universities to understand the backgrounds and prior academic experiences of students in order to provide 'whole university', targeted responses to improving retention rates and the student experience. Whilst much of the discussion and policy recommendations avoid the exceedingly large elephant in the room (teaching and learning resources, or, in other words, money) there is clearly a significant amount of clear thinking and goodwill proffered as to how assist transitioning students to stay and thrive within the university environment.

Like all other Australian Universities, VU is subject to quality assurance standards and measures, presently overseen by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). The university collects a wide range of student data as part of the need to demonstrate the requirements for good practice and to inform teaching, learning and research practices within the university. University wide data collection and analysis is used, in part, to inform policy development in areas such as student retention and success. The vast bulk of this data is quantitative in nature and tends to focus on the wider 'student experience'. One example of this is the bi-annual Student Evaluation Survey (SES) administered across every unit delivered within the university.

Research in Australia and at VU into student transition, retention and success can produce a sweepingly holistic view of the generic student experiences and challenges (e.g. Gabb, 2006, Milne et al., 2006, Messinis et al., 2009, Devlin and O'Shea, 2011). The majority of data collected and analysed within the university has also been generic and quantitative. The situation is mirrored nationally and internationally via the development of 'various evaluative and reflective initiatives for students, faculty and within whole institutions... sometimes on the basis of national or even international processes that have sought to foster these attitudes at all levels' (Broad and O'Flynn, 2012, p.2). Music is not the only area of arts currently struggling with the 'current emphasis on quality measurement that has arisen from the New Right's hijacking of the

public sphere' (Woodford, 2005, p.60). There is without doubt a great deal of localised qualitative discussion but that information tends to remain 'locked' within smaller communities of practice and struggles for impact on wider policy focus and action.

In addition, ironically in part due to rising attrition, VU has instigated a series of organisational restructures resulting in substantial reductions in academic and administrative staff across the university. Whilst it is well beyond the scope of this investigation to explore in detail the causes and effects of these institutional ruptures, understanding the backgrounds, challenges and needs of students coming to this VU environment is perhaps greater than ever. The necessity to use this knowledge to drive future directions in teaching and learning at VU is likewise of absolute import.

Music, and indeed arts and creative arts, face ever increasing challenges to maintain a secure foothold in the tertiary education landscape. It would seem that Arts disciplines have struggled for relevancy in education in comparison to other more career orientated study areas. Australia (and indeed many other Western democracies) have moved away from notions of 'education for the sake of education' to embrace more vocational imperatives in education. For example, VU (and other institutions) current marketing heavily emphasises the potential for employment upon graduation and employs language such as 'job ready' in branding and public relations communications.

Tertiary music teaching and learning teeters precariously at the edge of a higher education terrain characterised by reduced resourcing and an outcome driven policy agenda. The current trends of under resourcing and of increasing teacher to student ratios (and the subsequent near impossibility of sustaining funding for one to one instrumental lessons in music as part of the music curriculum) are illustrative of the tertiary music sector 'that conceives itself as continuously under threat' (Gould, 2012, p.82). The brief history of music at VU I have outlined above presents an illustrative glimpse into the unsteady footing of music teaching and learning. Reduced student to staff ratios and ever limited resources and administrative supports have also played their role in the challenges associated with teaching music at VU.

The growing challenges within local and global education generally, and within music, and arts, education more specifically, demand further exploration and greater understanding of the challenges to resist the reductions in quality, value and access. In testing times we should be looking more closely at what we do and how we might do it better. The 'struggles over the commodification of knowledge and the marketization of science' (Denzin and Giardina, 2015, p.16) brought about by the rise of global neoliberalism has led to challenges to the value qualitative methodology within the education field. This has impacted on the rate and volume of meaningful qualitative inquiry driving policy and practice in education.

Unsurprisingly the current global and local 'commodification of the university experience' (Denzin and Giardina, 2015, p.14) has affected tertiary music teaching and research. It has been argued there is a lack of 'substantial and sustained corpus of research investigating the content and experience of music teaching and learning in college/university...' (Broad and O'Flynn, 2012 p. 1). Despite regime change and a multitude of policy directives, vision statements trumpeting 'victory' and promising access, success and engagement sit uncertainly beside my observations of the very real challenges faced by music students at VU. Research into 'the student experience' at VU and within the wider education community has failed to adequately elucidate the challenges and experiences of the students I have worked with. Generalised and ongoing quantitative data generated by the university and the research findings do not speak to or explain the specific situation in music education at VU. Local and global paradoxes in education and research have coalesced to inform my decision to undertake a specific qualitative inquiry in a localised area of tertiary music education. In particular I am committed to investigating the experiences of students transitioning from music communities into the institutional music education environment. The need for loud and powerful voices within education, music education teaching, and research has led me to choose narrative inquiry and autoethnography as the methodological tools that underpin this research. I seek to inquire into the state of play within the music discipline at VU in an attempt to strengthen teaching and learning approaches on offer for music students.

There are substantial gaps in the fields of qualitative inquiry generally and into education and music education generally. This inquiry and this specific methodology provide useful addition to previous investigations in these areas. There is a need for story, habitus and voice in teaching, learning and research generally. Narratives emanating from a small, personal and local music education context such as the music department at VU can help to meet such a need. Green (2007), amongst others, has called for instances of specific, micro inquiries in the music education field. This inquiry contrasts to the plethora of generalised, statistic, 'expert' commentary and analysis that do not truly illustrate the complexities that arise for students who come from lower SES backgrounds. With this in mind, qualitative inquiry in a lower SES/lower tier music education context is warranted given that the majority of research into tertiary music education has taken place in first tier/choice universities.

Recommendations arising from data analysis in this investigation provide a way forward for music at VU and have the potential to inform music teaching and curriculum generally. This research will showcase and draw attention to effective teaching and learning approaches and effective university structures that are likely to lead to music students encountering greater satisfaction with their course. Findings from this investigation also contribute to the qualitative epistemologies and more specifically to ethnographic and autoethnographic inquiry into tertiary music education. Thus, investigative outcomes and processes are 'guided' by voices heard.

1.3. Research questions and outline of chapters

'You've been chosen as an extra in the movie adaptation of the sequel to your life'

['Shady lane'](#)

[Pavement](#)

This research was designed to explore music students' prior music and cultural experiences and motivations in music, and to examine their subsequent experiences of studying music at a tertiary institution. Specifically I wanted to ask:

- What are music students' experiences as they move from their local cultures and communities into a formal institution?
- What are music students' prior and out of school experiences?
- How do these experiences affect participation in the course?
- What challenges do music students face?
- Why might music students feel alienated and disengaged in the formal music education environment?

The thesis contains nine chapters. Chapters are organised into sub-chapters to take into account different stages of the participants' experiences. The individual stories of music students prior to and during formal music study permeate the thesis. My voice as the narrator, researcher and music educator counterpoints with the student voices throughout the writing that follows.

My life has been informed by, and can to a large extent be understood, through music – not unlike many of the participants in this research. I employ analogous *musical* themes throughout the thesis, including within titles of chapters and sub chapters, to assist with discussion of the *data* themes. I also reference music and provide an accompanying audio playlist as an extension of the concept of the metaphor analysis framework (Keller-Cohen and Gordon, 2003). Music acts as metaphor for the themes arising from the complex and idiosyncratic stories of the participants within this investigation and helps to make these refrains more sonorous.

This study could have been approached in various similar and different ways (as Montouri (2005), Green (2002, 2006) and others have done). It is important to note that there is no distinct literature review chapter contained within this thesis. Rather I have reviewed and discussed relevant literature throughout the thesis, particularly in the methodology, discussion and conclusion chapters. I chose to review and discuss the literature in this way because it made more sense to the overall structure and presentation of this study and because it more accurately represents how I went about researching and tackling the investigation. The structural idiosyncrasies of this thesis are reflective of the sometimes unorthodox and 'messy' nature of qualitative inquiry (Montuori, 2005, p.387).

Chapter two outlines the methodological framework and methods of inquiry. The chapter employs Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) conceptualisation of qualitative research from the 'general to the particular'. I present the methodology chapter as a story of how I went about the collection, investigation and analysis of the data. In keeping with the use of autoethnography as one of the methods of inquiry my story shifts in time between my initial methodoloical *planning* prior to and during data collection and the anlaysis process that I adopted. Later my *reflections* upon the investigative process are voiced. I present these reflections as my 'teachable moments' (Havighurst, 1953) in order to emphasise the ideosyncratic and atemporal nature of learning generally and my investigative journey more specifically.

Chapter three presents data from the participant cohort focusing on backgrounds and experiences prior to undertaking music study at VU. The chapter details initial encounters with music and how participants came to develop a sense of the musical self. Narratives describe and celebrate communities that nurtured participants and their learning that took place in these communities. There is also an acknowledgment of some of the more challenging aspects of these environments that impacted on student satisfaction and wellbeing. The chapter concludes with descriptions of the different paths students took to their university experience.

Chapter four shifts the focus to the student experiences of studying music at VU. The chapter details a range of contrasting experiences in formal tertiary music study. Respondents articulated the benefits of effective teaching and learning approaches and the importance of forming friendships with like-minded and passionate musicians. Conversely a range of challenges in negotiating formal tertiary music study were noted. Respondents defined and explored the characteristics of 'community' at VU and the parameters in which student community spaces were constructed. Conversations addressed the relevance of music study. The chapter concludes with students' ideas about tertiary music education and some authoritative comments on the importance of voicing story and self.

Chapter five contains 13 vignettes, or stories, written by me prior to and during the early stages of this investigative journey. The stories were written as an

attempt to coalesce the myriad observations of student journeys to and through the music department at VU. My own experiences as a music educator in this context are also recorded. The writing also allowed for the inclusion of my voice in the research process. Vignettes explore and suggest a range of key themes that are discussed as part of the wider analyses presented in chapters six and seven.

Chapter six presents the first of three chapters analysing the participant data. The chapter introduces analytical lenses chosen to explore data whilst acknowledging both the possibilities and potential limitations of the analytical framework. The experiences of participants in music communities from across four distinct pre-tertiary fields, prior to formal music study, are analysed using Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) notions of habitus and capital. The discussion explores the nature and interpretations of the challenges choices, power and learning young people experienced in the negotiation of these fields.

Chapter seven explores challenges experienced by musicians attempting to negotiate the formal tertiary music field in three sub-fields encompassing VE and HE music study. Challenges are conceptualised as analogous to the musical theme of 'tension'. Literature is discussed to frame and explain student experiences and themes raised in my vignettes from chapter 5. The chapter explores the intersection between student habitus, music capital and field leading to 'tensions' associated with powerlessness, anxiety and disconnection with music learning and doing. The chapter interrogates tensions linked to imbalances between performative music function, or practice, and formulaic doxa in tertiary music education. I analyse participant challenges within institutional contexts that act as the site for *reproduction* (as opposed to *production*) and investigate the struggle for agency within confining and passive notions of 'legitimacy'. I attempt to make some emerging comparisons between institutional contexts and community experiences. The chapter concludes by linking the nature and causes of student tensions to initial research aims.

Chapter eight provides compositional release through discussion of a series of successful negotiations of the formal tertiary field by participants in this research. I acknowledge the potential of cultural theory lenses to distort student experiences as inordinately deficient and constraining and celebrate the

possibility and potential for students to question and disrupt social and educational restrictions. The chapter explores how alternative readings of epistemological perspectives allow for the discovery and acknowledgement of participant habitus and the accrual of music skills and knowledge. Discussion highlights the potential for students to call for legitimacy and autonomy. Analysis points to the potential benefits to student well-being through building community characteristics within formal music curricula and pedagogy. The chapter focuses on the emancipatory possibilities achievable through examining the relationships between tension and release and function and form in formal music educational fields.

Chapter nine provides a summary of the findings from this research process. The chapter presents outcomes that inform current and future music education research method and design. The thesis concludes with a series of specific recommendations for teaching and learning in tertiary music.

Chapter 2. **There is method in my madness: An autoethnography of a methodology**

2.1. **Prelude**

*'Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew
When I bit off more than I could chew'*

['My way', Frank Sinatra](#)

The methodology chapter of this thesis takes an approach to privileging data findings that embody the subjective realm. I write this chapter as a story – a story about *how* I went about investigating and analysing the questions I proposed at the beginning of the research process. Although positioned near the beginning of this thesis, the methodology chapter functions as both an explanation of my method of inquiry and a reflection (or conclusion) of the processes I have undertaken in writing and completing the thesis. This thesis presents the data findings through a series of narratives and intertwining stories. Those stories have been collated, presented, explored, discussed and analysed in the light of other related literature. Voicing and hearing narratives and the establishment of present and continuing conversations between all the actors in this research has been at the heart of this investigation.

This structure of this methodology chapter utilises Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) conceptualisation of research from the 'general to the specific' through: choice and discussion of the field of inquiry; structuring paradigms; strategies of inquiry (methods); methods of collecting and analysing data; and finally to interpretation and evaluation of the data. I write about how I initially *planned* these phases of research prior to undertaking the research (largely, during the candidature process). This is the '**initial plans**' presented in each section of the chapter. I then reflect upon the *actions* (and some of the theories underpinning methodological tasks) from the now, providing some concluding comments about what this means for the research process generally and for me as a researcher more specifically. These comments are the '**reflections**' referred to in each section of the chapter. I utilise the idea of Havighurst's (1953) 'teachable moments' as a way of conceptualising my journey through the entire

research *process* (specifically the methodology and method of the research). I reflect upon and compare my initial learning about inquiry with the specific, non-linear, subjective 'teachable' moments or conditions of learning for me as a researcher and teacher.

2.2. Field of Inquiry

'I don't know where it's found
I don't mind
As long as the world spins around
I'll take my time'

['In search of a rose', The Waterboys](#)

Initial plans: Prior to candidature, I had been a lecturer and coordinator in a contemporary music degree at Victoria University for ten years. Over that time my colleagues and I had strived to prepare and teach quality music curriculum for our students. We had generally high retention and completion rates and quantitative data collection and analysis administered by the university was generally positive from year to year. In contrast I had observed many students who did not appear to be enjoying their studies. I met with a seemingly never-ending stream of students in my office with a dizzying array of challenges, gripes and complaints. I became interested in exploring the inconsistencies apparent in the quantitative data and my own observations and experiences. I also reasoned that a greater understanding of the student experience might help to inform the continuing development of tertiary music curriculum and pedagogy in the university. I was attracted to the idea that I need not necessarily pursue the absolute answer, or *outcome*, of the challenges and experiences of music students, but rather value the *process* of exploring their stories

This process required the design of a method to investigate the problem. I had a rudimentary understanding about the distinctive properties and functions of qualitative and quantitative fields. I spoke with colleagues, and later my supervisors, about the nature of the problem and how best to investigate it. I decided that qualitative methodology was the most appropriate field of inquiry. I felt also intuitively (but, in retrospect, without solid or detailed reasoning) that

this was the preferred method, not only because it suited the nature of the investigation, but because it seemed to sit most comfortably with me. I had read and thought about some interesting qualitative research in music education and there were important connections I made with the research I wanted to conduct. Roulston's (2006, p. 155) assertion that 'qualitative researchers are involved in knowledge construction to examine *meanings* from participants' perspectives, with findings emerging from data analysis in a inductive or bottom up, rather than a deductive or top down way' resonated with me. Milne et al. (2006) have utilised qualitative methodology in researching general themes of transition within the wider Victoria University student population (partly in order to employ an alternative investigative perspective to the plethora of statistical data and interpretation). I felt a qualitative approach might provide a clearer, or at least additional, sense of the more specific music student experience at Victoria University. I reasoned that this research might add to other research findings that highlight processes and structures that contribute to sustaining a satisfying university experience for all students.

I was interested by Burland and Pitts' (2007) qualitative investigations into students transitioning into the first year of higher education music. Like me, they appeared to be focused on attempting to really understand the challenges that music students face. They also sought to explore various academic and social measures to assist students and improve the learning experience. Regarding the appropriateness of qualitative research in the educational field, it has been commented that 'educators have welcomed the richer and more varied insights into educational settings that qualitative research produces' (Kervin et al., 2006 p. 37) and that 'for educators, this type of (applied) research is more common as teachers want to know which strategies will enhance the learning of their students' (ibid, p. 39). Research into music students and music education in the Australian context by Lebler (2008, 2007), Sefton-Green (2006) and Schippers (2007), among others, utilised qualitative approaches to explore the student experience in contemporary music education. Their work particularly centred on innovative, student centred curricular and pedagogical thinking.

The nature and problems of the (music) educational context at Victoria University have always appeared to me to be both complex and multi-faceted.

Kervin et al. (2006) emphasised that qualitative research was more aligned to building knowledge, more suitable for natural cultural settings and was more comfortable with a range of viewpoints and ideas. Indeed 'the qualitative approach draws on phenomenology, which is the belief that our worlds are independent, messy and unique. Therefore a qualitative researcher aims to understand this complexity rather than to uncover a 'knowable truth' (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 35).

Reflections: I tackled and completed the Confirmation of Candidature process, satisfying the initial requirements for the doctoral qualification. However, I experienced the process of application to graduate study as almost clinical. Things had to be done in an ordered and structured way. Quite possibly I belonged to that part of the graduate student population that experienced 'traditional academic inquiry (as) a particularly sterile and dispassionate process' (Montuori, 2005, p. 388). I also began to feel anxious about the expectations of the doctoral process. I felt I was supposed to 'know' everything about: the wider area of research; my specific context; where my research was situated in the field and wider literature; what methodological paradigm and data collection methods would best suit my inquiry; specific questions that would best suit the investigation, and have a reasonable set of hypotheses about what I'd find. Thus before I had asked any students (or indeed myself) anything about the issue that had sparked the investigative process, I felt I was expected to know it all. I had to be sure enough to convince a panel of supervisors and other (legitimate) academics that I knew what I was doing, that what I proposed had 'academic merit' and would be a 'contribution to knowledge'. Although I was able to satisfy the academic requirements for entry into the doctoral program I actually felt distinctly *unknowledgeable* and *illegitimate*.

Additionally, my intention to investigate the experiences of students was not a purely altruistic endeavour. There was at the time another, *hidden*, reason for undertaking the process. I had begun my career as a High School music teacher, moved into tertiary music education at a Classical music conservatorium and now found myself as a music academic in a small part of a very large university. I had an unnerving sense of pressure that I'd better undertake and complete a PhD pretty quickly otherwise I was not going to get

ahead (or even keep my position..?). I was reluctant to admit this thinking to anyone (or even myself) because it seemed hollow or expeditious.

I also struggled to reconcile my roles as a music teacher and soon to be music researcher with my identity as a musician. The pressures of full time teaching and coordinating resulted in less time and space for musicicking. As my roles changed I was challenged by the competing demands of music education *theory* and music *practice*. The functional musician self was becoming diluted. The sometimes formulaic requirements of my work resulted in a sense of lost creativity. I worried that that in a job where music proficiency was paramount (for both general competency and credibility) I was losing the music in me.

In retrospect this was the beginning of a narrative; a narrative that ran beside the research journey throughout its completion. This narrative served to provide some challenging moments of anxiety and doubt about my capacities as an academic, teacher, researcher and musician. Writing now, as I complete the final stages of this thesis, it seems entirely reasonable (even somewhat obvious) that I did *not* 'know it all' as I began the process. I realise now that I was not meant to understand the complexities and nuances of the research process. I could not have known that this space of *not* knowing is what we as teachers often find difficult and that encountering a sense of discontent is what often drives us to move forward with our quest for new knowledge and ways of being as both a teacher, researcher, musician and academic

Perhaps for some the learning about methodology and the research process does take place as they read, think about and discuss their proposals for graduate research. However it is interesting to reflect upon my teachable moments in qualitative research as I have undertaken this process, particularly those that imbue within me a sense of the relevance and value of qualitative inquiry to this study and, more generally, as a field of inquiry. My candidature story is also a small and personal attempt to share what Montouri (2005, p. 387) calls the 'interpersonal messiness' that is so often part of the research and inquiry process.

This candidature has provided valuable learning (via other teachable moments) about my agency and my identity. I have worked through the whole process

within the challenges of anxiety and doubt. I have learned that I am not alone in dealing with such feelings. Completing this work has provided a sense of power and achievement, despite the challenges. I realise now that there will always be uncertainty, and that *not* knowing is all part of my journey.

Qualitative research has been a contested and complex paradigm of enquiry with multiple historical phases. It has been defined as ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world...(that) consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...(and that) transforms the world’ (2011, p. 3). This description resonated loudly with me and sharpened my focus on the nature and role of qualitative inquiry. In the current context I came to understand that one of my worlds was the part of the university where I work to teach music to students. Setting out on this research journey I viewed qualitative inquiry as a useful method to effectively try to solve a puzzle. On reflection however, the qualitative model has prompted me to write *into* this thesis and has allowed me to see, be in and want to make better, this world. This process has allowed me to reflect upon who I am and what I have to say within the music education research community. I’ve learned that my voice, experience and interpretation of the music arena is valid and worthy of being made public.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 3) assert that contemporary qualitative research ‘asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalisation, freedom and community’. My investigative process began as a decidedly small and localised study of my students’ musical lives and study experiences. Indeed these findings discuss a small sample size and only speak on behalf of the participants in this study. However, all our stories related and explored herein form part of the wider field of qualitative research that aims to continue ‘big’ discussions. Qualitative inquiry has been a highly effective paradigm in which to investigate the communities of the students studying at Victoria University and, by extension, to gain a more generalised understanding of the nature and characteristics of music communities, particularly as they relate to higher education institutions. Qualitative methodology employed here has led to discussions about how common aspects of community, such as

music creativity and function, might be incorporated into formal music education. Qualitative methodology has prompted a conversation about how agency and choice might assist in understanding and challenging traditional notions of power and limitation within the formal music education fields. I came to appreciate this as student after student related instances of passivity and powerlessness in their educational experiences. The qualitative lens has led to an exploration of the nature and meaning of power from the 'on the ground' players in the field – students and teachers. The qualitative perspective allowed for a continued exploration of how the music student experience might be improved.

My formal education training highlighted the importance of the teacher as a reflexive and critical practitioner. The undertaking of research within the qualitative paradigm has taught me *how* I might become such a teacher. I was absorbed by the work of Kincheloe et al. (2011, p. 166) on the critical teacher, proposing that 'all teachers need to engage in a constant dialogue with students, a dialogue that questions existing knowledge and problematises the traditional power relations that have served to marginalise specific groups and individuals' . Meaningful conversations made possible via the qualitative paradigm enable teachers to learn about their students, understand their complex and personal worlds and to assist them to deal with the multiple challenges these worlds present. Conversations have opened up an exploration and understanding of how students negotiate and perceive themselves in the fields they inhabit. Traditional power dynamics within the educational field impact upon the learning and well-being of students and warrants further examination. This dialogue is valuable for the teacher also.

This research contributes to balancing qualitative inquiries with widespread ongoing quantitative investigation taking place within Victoria University and the Higher Education sector more generally. Quantitative research has become, and is utilised as part of, the dominant investigative and policy tool in the Higher Education sector because this method best serves the conceptualisation of educational institutions as 'vocational schools and research shops' (Levin and Greenwood, 2011, p. 27) .

Rankings for both teaching and research dominate the higher education landscape. Students, sometimes even referred to as 'customers' or 'clients', are surveyed constantly throughout their education as part of an attempt to collect, collate and advertise 'quality' and achievement. Disciplines of study are evaluated quantitatively as to their value, often via the actual number of students choosing to enter the discipline area. Student learning is often assessed numerically and student learning outcomes are routinely measured by reference to unit and course completion rates. McMahon (2009) argues that the quantitative measurement used to analyse student outcomes and drive institutional policy-making fails to account for the large amount of social (as opposed to purely formal, or 'knowledge') capital that students accrue through their university experiences. Levin and Greenwood (2011, p. 37) define students possessing this kind of capital as 'critical, well informed and reflective intellectuals able to address societal problems with integrity'. Qualitative inquiry can assist in the exploration of the nature and potential for this type of capital within education. In a localised way the qualitative lens has helped to identify the complex social, reflective, creative and interpersonal skills that Victoria University music students have accrued throughout their music education. This knowledge is in addition to formal music knowledge that they have previously acquired.

Another way of conceiving a need for balance in approaches to inquiry might be to acknowledge the need for both insider and external views of a given context, so that 'researchers might assert that their insider position allowed them to have insights that outsiders could not...' (Pelias, 2003, p. 663). The quantitative measuring of the student experience is often undertaken by the wider university bureaucratic apparatus, operating outside the specific area of study. The evaluation of quality in, and even importance of, entire discipline areas is sometimes administered by third party educational consultants who operate independently of the loci they are investigating. Although an external approach to investigation lends the characteristic of objectivity associated particularly with quantitative methodology, it does not follow that this should be the only approach driving the understanding and decision making within educational contexts. My insider qualitative exploration has allowed me to understand

important aspects of the student world(s) that statistical data does not provide. The qualitative paradigm has also promoted an insider, self-dialogue about me as a teacher, researcher, musician and person that contrasts to the external evaluative gaze of the institution and educational field.

As I have indicated, I came to write this methodology chapter as the penultimate chapter of the thesis. Having theorised at the outset about how I would investigate the problem I was now able to reflect on how I had *actually* gone about it all. Did I utilise the field of qualitative research in the way that I had planned to when setting out on this journey? Did my investigative process really qualify as 'qualitative' research and if so, was it employed appropriately for the circumstances? The choice of the qualitative paradigm to collect and view my data sounded simple and straightforward at the beginning but, reflecting as I attempted to write this chapter, the whole journey seemed messy, unruly and highly resistant to definition and description. So it was both revelatory and emancipatory for me to read Erickson's (2011, p. 56) depiction of the role and nature of qualitative inquiry to explore the 'subtle poetics of everyday social life – it's rhyming, the nonliteral, labile meanings inherent in social action, the unexpected twists and turns that belie prediction and control'. Thus I realised that qualitative inquiry was almost necessarily messy, like the frustrations, surprises, disappointments and breakthroughs that marked my journey.

I came to understand that the qualitative paradigm was particularly well suited to exploring musicians and music education. Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 4) compared qualitative inquiry with '...Jazz, which is improvisation, creates the sense that...sounds...and understandings are blending together, overlapping and forming a composite, a new creation.' The voices in this enquiry have been recorded and then mixed together in chorus to sound a new composition, a new creation. These narratives are the composite of many layers and twists and rises and falls, that contract and expand, tense and release, just as dynamic variation operates in the music score. This qualitative investigation, like a piece of music, does not offer definite answers to the initial research questions but rather invites further listening and exploration and seeks to result in further questioning?

I had read about the merits and applications of qualitative research but had not thought deeply about the nature of quantitative research. Further exploration and understanding of important distinctions between the qualitative/quantitative paradigms, and gaining some insight into the paradigm wars that had raged for decades, allowed me to explain my initial intuition. I not only recognised these tensions in qualitative inquiry literature and music education communities but felt instantly aligned with ‘more humanistic approaches’ Montouri (2005, p. 390). I was drawn to the idea that ‘the word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or *measured* (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency’ and that the paradigms might be characterised as ‘exploration versus confirmation’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 7). I came to identify with the qualitative researcher (who) first asks ‘what are the kinds of things (material and symbolic) to which people in this setting orient as they conduct everyday life? This can be contrasted with the quantitative researcher (who) first asks ‘how many instances of a certain kind are there’ (Erickson, 2011, p. 43). ‘These people who share the same interests we have’ (Montuori, 2005, p. 375) were asking the kinds of questions I was interested in exploring.

It was revelatory to discover that quantitative research, emphasising scientific rigour and objectivity in order to establish incontestable positions (able to be learned and possessed as knowledge) was connected to major themes explored in this study. Notions of form, with the associated ideas of constraint, correction, limitation and rigidity were articulated in the challenges experienced by educational attempts to measure creative practice. I have now learned that the notions of function and practice resonate with me and relate closely to what I’ve explored and found. These concepts sit comfortably with the explorations of functional habitus and the findings that music education should be functional as well as providing ‘knowledge’.

2.3. The investigative paradigm

*'Yes, the strong gets more
While the weak ones fade'*

['God bless the child', Billie Holiday](#)

Initial plans: I detailed no plans. I understood the basic tenets of postmodernism and the contested, constructed notions of truth and authenticity in a postcolonial globalised world. I recognised that the world and its' long and infinitely complex history and peoples could be viewed through different lenses which manifested different outcomes. However, I didn't connect such thinking to the methodological approach I brought to this research. I didn't really understand that an epistemological paradigm would need to be acknowledged and applied to my inquiry.

Reflections: Having written the data presentation chapters I felt ready to tackle the discussion of the data. I knew this was a crucial part of the thesis. This was to be the unpacking of the data, where I came to terms with the major themes being raised and attempted to make sense of what all the stories really meant. However, I found the process uncomfortably difficult as I shifted ideas and data around again and again, struggling to say something meaningful. This went on for some time and I became increasingly despondent about putting anything of substance together. I lost confidence. I let the writing go for some time and, somewhere at the edges of the space I had afforded myself, I came to an important realisation: I simply didn't know enough about what other researchers and educators thought about the kinds of challenges and ideas that I was attempting to discuss. The reading I had undertaken prior to and during the process to that point was insufficient. At that point in the candidature I had been firmly positioned outside the thinking and writing in the area(s) I was attempting to explore, a 'mere bystander' rather than an 'active participant' in the literature communities (Montuori, 2005, p. 375). I had become preoccupied with the collecting, presenting and thinking *within* the participant stories, but now I realised that I had to engage with some more external ideas and perspectives in order to contextualise my data.

This realisation was both revelatory and awkward for me. On one hand I felt immensely relieved that I could stop trying to mould, shape and understand the data and simply read about what other researchers had done in the field. On the other hand, I felt like I was holding the process up, delaying the onward march towards completion. The idea of stopping to read felt somehow *remedial*. It was difficult (yet of obvious import, in hindsight) for me to admit that I lacked the necessary understanding of the area and that I had not sufficiently prepared for the process of analysis. Furthermore, I felt like I was disappointing my supervisors when I explained that no further drafts would be available for some time. I felt like I was making excuses for not getting on with it. Nevertheless I had made the decision and so I went away from the writing and started to read again.

I deliberately avoided trying to locate texts and ideas specific to my research but rather read widely about music education and the creative and collaborative processes of music. I read a wide range of various investigative approaches. I encountered researchers who spoke about power and position within music education, some of whom used sociological and philosophical themes to explain and understand the experiences of music students (e.g. Mills, 2008, Moore, 2012, Azaola, 2012). The link between agency and the educational experiences of students resonated with me. Some authors utilised cultural theorists and sociologists such as Barthes, Foucault and Bourdieu. I came across Bourdieu's 'Outline of a Theory of Practice' (1977) and then read 'Distinction' (1986) closely. From the outset light bulbs of recognition began to burn brightly. The concepts of habitus, capital and field seemed to describe the stories at the hearts of my investigations so aptly. Bourdieu's work explored the construction, nature and use of power; those who possessed it, how they had come to have it and how these factors played out in the world(s) we live in. The dynamics of power appeared an effective way to contextualise many of the challenges that abounded in so many of the experiences of the participants. Reduced, limited or non-existent agency seemed closely linked to the motivations, actions and encounters of the protagonists in the stories I had written to capture my observations and feelings about the student experience of formal education. This realisation mirrored Montouri's (2005) assertions that certain literature

speaks to us in different ways and the importance of the subjectivity in interpreting and discussing what these ideas mean to us.

'The political bricoleur knows that science is power' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 5).

The word 'science' is derived from the Latin '*scientia*' meaning knowledge. Knowledge can be constructed and presented as certain, factual, absolute and is often associated with claims of truth or authenticity. Knowledge is power because it arms the possessor of it with the armour of truth and rightness. Music education existed, at least in part, to provide circumstances for the accrual of knowledge, and my stories were about agents' experiences in pursuit of this knowledge. I decided that the data could effectively be viewed and discussed through a lens of power (place and cultural capital), disposition (background or habitus) and situation (field). In fact habitus appeared to be a highly appropriate concept that could be extended to incorporate the actual or whole story of each protagonist within the research.

These multidisciplinary lenses helped me start to make sense of the data I had collected. The exploration of ideas from different literature communities 'can open up the inquiry...by breaking down what might have become fixed disciplinary lenses' (Montuori, 2005, p. 381). Themes from this wider and deeper reading resonated with(in) my stories and helped to clarify what was really going on. These approaches constituted the 'theoretical paradigm' that I had chosen to house my discussions, what Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 13) refer to as writing and thinking 'guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied'. Extensive reflexive thinking about myself as teacher, researcher, musician and person led me to commit to an epistemological standpoint, a set of underlying principles by which I might proceed to explore the stories before me. Combining cultural theory with a sense of social justice and equality suited the fundamental idea that the student voice, so often silenced and unheard, should be sounded. This was both the premise and outcome of the entire body of work. It was empowering to acknowledge that methodology was a way of exploring the data that also involved the potential as an active way of changing things for the better 'for understanding and for producing resistances to local structures of domination'

(Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.14). In outlining the development of qualitative inquiry and epistemological paradigms Erickson (2011, p. 45) felt that these researchers wanted to 'advocate for and to inform social change'. Qualitative investigations, like my inquiry, have often focused on power dynamics and the possibility of change within local or community contexts (Grossberg and Pollock, 2012).

This methodological paradigm appeared wholly relevant to music education particularly as 'the school curriculum should in part be shaped by problems that face teachers and students in their effort to live just and ethical lives' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 165). I was attracted to the notion that those involved in music education should ask questions and engage in critical thinking as they moved about in and investigated the(ir) world(s). Teachers and students occupy many spaces simultaneously – often in highly localised contexts but always as part of the educational transactions in a global space. I came to understand better the inextricably related roles of teacher and researcher. Teachers could also be researchers, naturally by virtue of their educative role 'studying students so that can be better understood and taught' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 166). 'Critical teachers listen carefully to what students have to say about their communities and the problems that confront them' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 166) and they do so because they acknowledge the right and importance of the student voice in educational contexts. It was reassuring to find literary support for my initial idea of listening to students for the purposes of improving the experiences in music education.

I came to understand more clearly this theme of power as it related to me, my teaching, students and music education within (and without) institutional contexts. It was therefore interesting to read about the role of the critical researcher, who understands that 'all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164). After collecting, reading, thinking about and unpacking the data, I came to see our experiences in music communities and in formal tertiary music education as being bound in the dynamics of power positions and processes. Kincheloe et al (2011, p. 164) argued that 'certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others...and...the oppression that

characterises contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable'. However, as Pelias (2003, p. 370) acknowledges 'it's hard when you have so little information and no funds and no power to make anything happen'. So the critical and qualitative methodology employed herein is deliberately attempting to question this privilege and the status of the agents in these fields, for the 'empowerment of individuals' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164). These are the students, researchers, teachers and musicians alike, who become active players in 'constructing research that contributes to the struggle for a better world' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164). As Pelias (2003, p. 360) confirms 'public realisations (like research findings)...often carry an implicit or explicit call to action'.

My meandering journey from a somewhat utilitarian understanding of research methodologies to a more nuanced, engaged interest in investigative paradigms was illustrative of the often complicated nature of qualitative research. A breakthrough of sorts was to understand that methodological approaches could overlap, defy specific delineation and description and move and shift just as the narratives of the subjects being investigated did: 'bricoleurs move into the domain of complexity. The bricolage (as it applies to multi-disciplinary research methodologies) exists out of respect for the lived world and the complications of power. Indeed it is grounded in the epistemology of complexity' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 168). My methodological approach has, in this messy way, been recursive and I have 'constantly revise(d)...questions...and data collection as (I) gather and analyse data' (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 58). My approach to research, reflection and writing has not been neat and linear, in keeping with the winding, idiosyncratic stories at the heart of this research.

The notion of complexity applied to a broader understanding of the research subjects' narratives. I became concerned that cultural reproduction theory might somehow lock students and teachers into powerless, hopeless positions within institutional fields. However, looking again and again closely at the stories, there were so many examples of resilience and harmony. Powerlessness and passivity did not tell the whole story. I read further and began to understand that there were emancipatory possibilities within cultural theory (e.g. Azaola, 2012,

Driver, 2011, Mitchell, 2007, Scott, 2012). I came across authors who identified and applied sociological and philosophical lenses to student experiences to identify challenges but also strengths and triumphs (e.g. Pitts, 2007, Kokotsaki and Hallam, 2007). A bricolage of lenses allowed for a complex interplay of understandings of the experiences of the agents in this research.

I had always been attracted to the idea of framing my writing with reference to musical terms and language. I thought that a metaphor analysis framework might be useful for discussion of the themes arising from the data (Keller-Cohen and Gordon, 2003). My thesis was rooted in music stories and expression so I reasoned that the use of music concepts might assist to make fluid, unstructured ideas more 'concrete' (Lakoff, 1993, p. 245). I hoped that employing the language of music might make the writing (and reading) more interesting, creative, or, well, musical and that the approach might set my work apart from more formalised writing. I began to think of the thesis like a story with themes. Story can be seen as (is analogous to) a composition. A composition is comprised of melodic themes and other music characteristics that come together to form the structure of the work. In music, a theme is a kind of musical expression or idea identifiable as a part of the overall music structure. Thematic changes and processes are often structurally important. Musical themes are recognizable, repeating, and developing within the music structure of a composition. The various musical themes within a composition combine to underpin or describe the 'compositional narrative'. I felt that the data in this research might be presented with musical themes employed to tell (or contextualise) this story which was, after all, about music. I sensed that the music analogy could be a creative way of organizing the presentation of the data – the story or narrative - of the thesis. The use of musical themes as musical metaphors for the 'real' data themes could be 'precisely the ties that bind: the very artificiality/artifactuality of links that 'create' things, or rather create stability, out of the shifting/mobile/unmoored things-at-hand' (Bono, 1998).

However, my first efforts at framing a discussion using music concepts seemed trite and constructed. It was as if I was simply using metaphor as a way of re-telling the same stories without saying anything about what they really meant.

The discovery and choice to use the investigative paradigms outlined above allowed me to *frame* stories with music analogy as well as *understand* experiences in wider social, cultural and philosophical contexts. These lenses helped me to explain the releases as well as the tensions – the major evaluative dynamics/themes of the discussion chapters.

My methodological approach to this research involved a choice about which approach best suited the project and was illustrative of my own philosophical self-systems. I now see that the nature of my inquiry and the way in which I chose to structure and present the findings are symbolic representations of me as teacher, researcher and person. As Pelias (2003, p. 660) argued ‘personal realisations (through writing) inform writers about themselves as individuals. They place them in touch with their own attitudes, beliefs, and feelings; with their own relational attachments and political investments; with their own sense of the world.’ This process of reflexivity, of questioning and discoursing with the self throughout the research journey, has been a ‘process of discovery: discovery of the subject (and sometimes the problem itself) and discovery of the self’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 124).

These reflections on the investigative paradigm constituted just some of *my* ‘teachable moments’. Havighurst (1953) is credited with the term which broadly refers to the timing and contexts in which different individuals develop understanding and learning. Teachable moments are the subjective, idiosyncratic times in our lives. In Greek mythology the god Kairos represented the concept of *the right time* whereas the god Chronos came to be associated with a notion of time as exact and universal. Like these differing concepts of time ‘teachable moments’ are actively found by individuals at different times, rather than imposed collectively. Many of my *right times* were not at the start of the thesis, or within traditional chronologies of research processes, but appeared during and after much of the work had already been completed. This partly explains the writing of the methodology chapter as the penultimate chapter of the thesis. Similarly, teachable moments might exist for musicians by allowing for flexible or idiosyncratic conditions, rather than linear and traditional (chromatic) learning.

2.4. Strategy of inquiry

'Iceblink luck', The Coctau Twins

Initial plans: My methods design was initially planned to uncover as many layers of the music student experience as possible. I wanted my method of inquiry to be rooted in the notion of story, the lives and experiences of the students I was investigating. Thus the idea of ethnography was at the heart of the initial research design. In addition I wanted to explore my writing about being a music teacher, and to present and discuss all of these narratives together. I was attracted to the idea that 'the strength of ethnography (is) that it allows the researcher to collect information that cannot be easily quantified and allows for a cross-cultural comparison of complex and contextual attitudes, experiences and behaviours' (McIntyre, 2008, p. 212).

Reflections: As I begun the research process I had come across a number of ethnographic (Baker, 2007, Burland and Pitts, 2007, Gallan, 2012, Pitts, 2007, Rowe, 2012) and autoethnographic writers (Ellis, 2002, Ellis and Bochner, 2006, Denzin, 2006, Harrison, 2012, Pelias, 2003) whose work struck me as honest, moving and highly effective in exploring human stories. I decided that ethnography and autoethnography would be central to my strategy of inquiry. Over the course of the research process I encountered similar strategies of inquiry and I learned that although they can be conceived and defined in different ways they all overlap and share some fundamental and common characteristics.

I felt my research shared some affinity with case study strategies of inquiry that involved 'a detailed investigation of a person, place or thing...trying to explain why things are the way they are' (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 70). Case studies commonly used data collection methods like interviews and observations just as I had included in my investigations (Kervin et al., 2006) that might be presented as narratives or in narrative way. Erickson (2011, p. 53) claimed that case studies could be used to 'address matters of value, power and local detail, as there are pertinent to policy decision making'. I certainly hoped that the locus, or case, that I had explored addressed specific characteristics that could impact on wider considerations in the field.

Exploring narrative strategies of inquiry also resonated with this research. I had conceptualised my research from the start as being closely linked to the notion of story. I wrote stories (or vignettes) about my experiences and observations as a music educator. I felt that the interviews with the student participants were about hearing their stories. As Chase (2011, p. 423) has noted 'when narrative researchers gather data through their in-depth interviews, they work at transforming the interviewee-interviewer relationship into one of narrator and listener...(which) involves...inviting narrators' specific stories.' Analysing the data, including my own vignettes, was in effect the exploring of a collection of stories in the hope of sharing a larger, more cohesive narrative. The approach made sense to me. As an avid reader I had long appreciated the ability of story to explore whole worlds, peoples and (hi)stories 'using our own stories as vehicles for exploring more general principles' (Seale, 2010, p. 109). I came to identify with other narrative researchers who wanted 'to construct narratives that represent the experiences and perceptions of their participants' (Roulston, 2006, p. 159) just as I had done with my vignettes, focus groups and interviews. Montouri (2005) conceptualised literary discussions like these as being part of a 'community of discourse'. It was heartening to finally feel a part of such a community and relevant also to the notions of community that were bound up in the music stories underpinning this investigation.

Chase (2011, p. 421) has written that 'narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them'. I too was 'interested' in hearing and understanding stories of students who I taught and learned with over the years. I relished the opportunity to create the slow, deep learning conditions of conversation and sharing. I was passionate about the possibilities of story as an alternative to data driven quantitative research in university policies and decision making. As Josselson (2007, p. 8) noted, narrative research allows 'for the study of people's lives as lived, people whose life experiences has been lost in the search for central tendencies'. Narrative inquiry was highly appropriate for a study in an institutional context where imbalances between the institutional and student voice called for deeper, and alternative, explanation. Chase (2011, p. 430) has likewise argued that 'like qualitative research generally, narrative research often critiques cultural

discourse, institutions, organisations and interactions that produce social inequalities’.

Narrative inquiry has also provided the benefits of storytelling to the teller of those stories. Sharing significant life events can be an important part of the journey to self-discovery and overcoming confronting challenges (e.g. Foster et al., 2005, Foster et al., 2006). In fact, several participants in this research commented that the telling of their stories had been cathartic or emancipatory. Pelias (2003, p. 661) referred to ‘storying (as) a self-making process. It helps authors construct their perceptions of the world, see new terrain, and live with alternative views.’ It’s evident that such processes led participants to feel acknowledged and present. Evidently the act of storytelling assisted in ameliorating the experience of powerlessness, of being silent/silenced.

I had initially planned an ethnographic approach as a preferred strategy of inquiry. I conducted interview and focus groups and presented the findings alongside my own vignettes I had written, trying to encapsulate a sense of my experiences as a teacher in this space. Vignettes were analysed as part of the discussion chapters (and are presented in Chapter 5). Coming to write the methodology chapter I encountered some challenges about how to outline and discuss this ‘strategy of inquiry’. I confided to my partner that I was struggling to define exactly how I had gone about my research. Had I employed a purely ethnographic approach? Had I actually been using the experiences of music students as a case study for music research? Had I employed narrative inquiry strategy? How was all of this different to action research? Without hesitation she replied that she thought I’d probably done a bit of all those things. Her reply implied that describing honestly how I had gone about the research process was more important than confining definitions.

I have learned that it is perhaps more important (and interesting) that researchers can clearly outline *how* they went about the research as opposed to accurately and neatly describing it - constraining a complex and functional process to formal descriptions and definitions. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 6) noted ‘as a site of discussion or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly’ and ‘nor does qualitative research have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own.’ Montouri (2005, p. 390) also pointed to the

‘tension’ ...between... rigorous scholarship’ and the emancipatory opportunities for growth in academic inquiry. I relished the respite from formality and restriction in the academic process of inquiry afforded by the qualitative approach. Chase (2011, p. 431) also remarked upon the possibilities of release that qualitative inquiry offers, in claiming that ‘the complexities and multiplicities in contemporary narrative inquiry offer novice and seasoned researchers a great deal of freedom in the topics and interests they pursue and the methods and approaches they use.’

2.5. Methods of collection and analysis

*‘Oh, but sometimes the light
Can be so hard to find’*

[‘Moon at the window’, Joni Mitchell](#)

Initial plans: It seemed that the most effective way to collect data in the inquiry was to have conversations with the subjects (including myself), to invite them (and me) to tell our stories, to listen to them and to then think about what they had said. I chose interviews and focus groups as the methods for having these conversations. I chose to write vignettes as a way of encapsulating my thoughts and observations as a music teacher at Victoria University. The research approach involved narrative (students and my stories), case study (Melbourne music communities and the music department at Victoria University), ethnographies (students and mine own, established through multiple methods of journals, observation, interviews, focus groups) and autoethnography (writing the self in the research and in the field).

I used purposive sampling to invite a select number of students from the different areas of music education at Victoria University. Presentations were made to music students from the VE music programs (= VE 1) and those students undertaking a major study of music as part of their undergraduate education studies (= HE 1). I also targeted students who had recently graduated from the Bachelor of Music course (= HE 2) as no sample was able to be recruited from current undergraduate music courses, as the course had been discontinued as part of a university wide restructure. These groups of students constituted the three participant groups for recruitment. Participants were

recruited to be representative of students with prior music backgrounds but with three sets of different educational experiences of music at Victoria University.

I also attempted to recruit a sample that represented the different characteristics of these cohorts including NESB, mature age, cultural background, ethnicity, socio cultural background, music genre preference and level of music experience. I tried to ensure that all students were informed and provided multiple and flexible opportunities to participate. I encouraged participation by emphasising the opportunity to 'have your say' and the long term benefits to student learning experience. (See Appendix 1. Participant Information).

Interviews, focus groups and the vignettes constituted the elements of the research design. Kervin et al (2006) highlighted observation, interviews, focus groups, collection and analysis of artefacts as all appropriate data collection methods for qualitative methods like case studies and ethnography. I was attracted to the idea that 'interviews can...(provide) richness of response (that) can add markedly to the researcher's understanding of the social setting under investigation' (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 88). I was required to submit a set of sample questions for the university ethics procedures. I prepared questions with the intention of paying close attention to participant commentary whilst aiming to employ active listening, flexibility, sensitivity, humour and creative ways to engender discussion (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 89). I was mindful that questions would act as prompts for the conversations. The objective was to encourage spontaneity and treat each conversation as an opportunity to explore each student's unique backgrounds and experiences (Gray et al., 2007).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 7) claimed that 'qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor's perspective by detailed interviewing and observation'. In depth interviews have been used effectively in music research into perceptions and attitudes of tertiary music students (see for example: Thompson, 2002, Feichas, 2010, Mantie, 2013). Interviews can be an important part of the process that qualitative researchers undertake in striving to understand the 'phenomenal world through the study of events, actions, talk and interactions' (Barrett, 2007, p. 417).

I felt that focus groups could also contribute in eliciting valuable and interesting stories from participants in research projects. Lashua and Fox (2006) used in-depth interviews and focus groups to examine the use of rap and hip hop music in Aboriginal youth culture. Rich stories began to emerge when information from interviews was combined with focus group data. Focus groups were also employed in the study of young musicians' attitudes to out of school learning experiences providing useful insights into how learners go about developing creative processes (Salderman and Folkestad, 2004).

As I prepared for and conducted interviews I also wrote stories (or vignettes) recounting my experiences of the students. I wrote stories, captured through extensive journaling and memory, about my observations as a music educator. I hoped to allow readers to 'emotionally 'relive' the events with the writer' (Richardson, 2000, p. 11), by employing autoethnography as a way to explore these issues. I attempted to articulate experiences for the reader by creating stories that captured the observations and opinions of music students involved with different levels and areas of music education. I was also interested to explore how this method of data collection might add to traditional methods of inquiry in the field, as there had been little use of autoethnography in music education to that time (Roulston, 2006). I was attracted to the notion that autoethnography seemed particularly useful in providing an opportunity for the researcher to reflect upon the area of research in order to more acutely define the specific issues that might require further and varied research methodology. I intended to analyse the stories to elicit the major themes that might drive further detailed research, in order to address and enhance students' experiences in music education. I also felt that in employing autoethnography I could develop my voice as a reflective practitioner. Reading the intensely personal, honest and sometimes painful reflections of others (including: Bartleet, 2009, Ellis, 2002, Ellis and Bochner, 2006, Weems et al., 2009) inspired me to pursue the development of my own narrative tone as a music educator.

In the end, I conducted twenty eight interviews, three focus groups and collated 13 vignettes to construct the data explored in this thesis. I conducted the three focus groups first with each of the three participant groups. Focus group one contained nine Vocational Education students. Focus group two contained eight

Bachelor of Education students undertaking a major in music Education. Focus group three contained 11 Bachelor of Music graduates.). I then used the 1:1 interviews to explore in more depth the themes raised in the focus groups. I also chose not to recruit teaching colleagues or other university staff as I wanted my discussions to be focused on the voices of students. Students have historically been under represented in music education and research into music education. Inclusion of the teacher and/or institutional voice might have risked this imbalance being perpetuated within my work.

Reflections: I chose the interview method thinking the process would be an effective method for collecting data. On reflection, the ethnographic process has come to mean more about finding ways to engender a series of complex and multifarious discussions. Data arising from interviews and focus groups, from stories and the writing in and about those stories, has been 'not so much as representation but as *communication*' (Ellis, 1996, p. 19). Discussion with students has led to discussion with supervisors and colleagues and to conversations with me. These are conversations as story - important, emotional dialogues that sometimes *have* 'to be fashioned into a story' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p. 443).

This methodology involved a great deal of reflexive thinking about me as a teacher, a researcher, musician and person. Autoethnographic research is 'a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as a teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 124). I was not aware, as I began this journey of inquiry, about the extent to which I would need to think about the stories I had now collected, and in particular how all the stories could be interpreted together. An important teachable moment for me was coming to understand that data collection and analysis was a highly complex and ongoing process. It involved listening *and* unpacking, constructing *and* deconstructing my writing, asking and answering myself. Like the students at the heart of this enquiry, I have had my own journey as an educator engaged in research but also *becoming* a researcher, of *becoming* a reflective practitioner. Montouri (2005, p. 389) felt that 'a literature review is an opportunity for self- observation and self-inquiry'. For me, the decision to incorporate the literature review within

and throughout the body of the thesis was illustrative of a process of reflexivity. The learning, searching and discussions led to the incorporation of a non-traditional, non-linear and personal approach to what might be seen as a formulaic and 'dry' part of the thesis process.

I came to understand and accept that collecting and understanding the lives, hopes, challenges, fears and triumphs of a group of musicians was a necessarily chaotic and confused process, or what Montouri (2005, p. 387) referred to as 'interpersonal messiness'. There was to be no straightforward answers to the questions initially asked. Nor was it straightforward to describe the myriad ways I had used to collect, think about and present these stories. It was paradoxically alarming and refreshing to learn that 'we think of ethnography as a journey... (rather than a) destination' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p. 431). The decision to stop writing and analysing, to spend a year reading and thinking disrupted the linear production of the thesis. The necessary, simultaneous thinking and doing, of making sense of the stories that I had sought to hear, disrupted the chronological process of the 'collection then analysis' approach. I chose to weave stories together, discussing literature where I felt it added to explanation or elucidation. I struggled to present voices coherently, in particular, my own. Initially I tried to be impartial, objective and I purposefully avoided the use of first person narrative. I gradually came to realise that I could not leave my voice out and so I redrafted writing to more honestly reflect me. I found strength through reading that 'by writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings' (Holt, 2003, p. 2). The confusions and jumbled approaches are characteristic of the choices I've made as a 'methodological bricoleur (who is) adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 5).

The most significant teachable moments for me have related to the field of autoethnography. Setting out to investigate, and be guided, by the voices of music students, I had little idea of how I would be guided by my own voice. I have come to understand that the method uses writing to capture, inquire and

comment 'conducting oral and life history interviews with others, or, recounting their own life experiences' (Roulston, 2006, p. 158). I have learned that autoethnography is far more than the name of a method of inquiry but is concerned with power, connection, humanity, communication and honesty. I have also reflected that there is a long and contested history of autoethnographic research (see Denzin, 2006, Ellis and Bochner, 2006), perhaps in part, because the method involves such personal, confronting and challenging themes. It is noteworthy also that the autoethnographic method itself boldly challenges a long and insistent history of the 'traditional elimination of the inquirer from the process of inquiry' (Montuori, 2005, p. 387).

Autoethnography is a 'genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context' (Reed-Denahay, 1997, p. 2). I have used my own experiences in the research fields to examine reflexively the connections between the researcher and the researched. I have come to understand that the purpose of this research has been not only to appreciate the stories of those involved in music education but also 'to open up conversations about how people live' (Ellis, 2006, p. 435). The writing about and within these conversations mirrors the call and response in music conversations so that 'autoethnography is...ensemble, a cappella, and accompaniment...Jazz and blues...' (Spry in Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 497). Writing the self connects the writer to the context and subjects, in the same way music is often inextricably linked to how and who we see ourselves as - the accompanying soundtrack to our lives. These realisations in part explain the decision to create and provide a playlist that accompanies this thesis; an opportunity for the reader to further connect with a music context of this inquiry and the Participants who 'sing' their stories within it. Music, or more specifically music that speaks to me and of the themes raised in this investigation, represents my uniqueness as person, teacher, musician and teacher. Writing and listening enables me/us to become human:

'One's unique voicing – complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expansiveness – is honoured. In this way the reader gains a sense of the writer as a full human being'. (Gergen and Gergen, 2002, p. 12).

My unabashed assertion of self in the writing has allowed me to explore and reveal myself in the multiple roles within this larger narrative. In doing so I have attempted to connect readers to this story through me, opening opportunities for them to 'care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p. 433). I have sometimes felt anxious about my prowess as a teacher and researcher in a field that expects toughness, confidence and assertiveness. I certainly tried to show and explore that vulnerability through the discussion of my anxieties as a teacher and academic in my stories. Throughout I was buoyed by authors I had read who had likewise attempted to create a human connection that required 'the researcher to be vulnerable and intimate' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p. 433). Vulnerability of the researcher is central to the notion of 'discomfort' and its importance in pulling us away from our comfort zones that may not always be the best place to understand social phenomena.

The stories in this investigation revolved around the central theme of power. I was not so much surprised by the discovery of this theme in student experiences, but the degree to which power affected their experiences. Similarly I was not prepared for the extent to which power arose as part of the examination of my experiences. Writing these narratives has brought teacher, researcher and student closer together, roles that have historically been separated and divided by the degree and nature of agency that have resided in each. This kind of inquiry 'helps undercut conventions of writing that foster hierarchy and division' (Ellis and Bochner, 2006, p. 436).

This personal and exploratory writing and thinking has brought about some interesting discoveries related to 'divisions' within myself relating to agency and self-belief. When I came to write the conclusion my supervisors commented that there was a lack of conviction in my statements – too many 'oughts' and not enough unequivocal statements. As we talked I thought about my anxiety throughout the whole research process and my reluctance to put forth my position, anxious that what I had to say might not contain value. As I wrote the initial draft I was worried that I was coming across too vehemently. I was later reminded of Pelias' (2003, p. 371) words '...you wouldn't want to claim that you have more than a partial grasp of his work, if that; even still, you know the

tradition of quoting that is supposed to prove you know something and you know that you aren't doing enough of it here to prove your case.' This thinking has defined much of my anxiety, and sense of powerlessness, at times - the 'partial grasp' of my sources to support and contextualise my argument; the 'partial grasp' of methodology, of analysis and discussion. But...

I have slowly begun to assert myself through, and by, this reflexive writing process. Even the choice of referencing 'I' has been a kind of affirmation that I have the right to be acknowledged as a legitimate presence in academic inquiry. This style and purpose of writing felt strange and scary but also powerful and brave. By writing and thinking openly I have gained power, emphasising myself and my ideas; whilst simultaneously releasing the voices of the participants challenging institutional conventions where the student voice is rarely, really, heard.

Reading over my draft chapters I was struck by the removed and formal tone. I have learned that this tone was borne from anxiety and powerlessness in the face of formality and hierarchy. The desire to become more confident, through reading, thinking and writing has challenged these insecurities and permitted me to write in the familiar, first person rather than present the (hidden) third person version of myself. This process has not only empowered me but also mirrored my concluding remarks calling for the development of self-directed and empowered students in the learning process.

2.6. Ethics

*'I've been a long time that I've wandered
Through the people I have known'*

['Northern sky', Nick Drake](#)

Initial Plans: Ethics approval was required by the university before the research process could begin. I was obliged to demonstrate to the faculty ethics committee that participants in my research would be recruited free from coercion, with full consent and that research processes would ensure that confidentiality was established and maintained throughout. The committee also

required that strategies be implemented to minimise any identified psychological, social or other risks.

Students were invited to participate voluntarily and provided with clear and thorough information about the nature, purpose and outcomes of the research. Students were required to read and sign consent forms prior to participating. I undertook to disclose all current and future teaching commitments and roles at Victoria University so that participants would be aware of my identity as both teacher/employee and researcher. To ensure confidentiality I offered that data analysis and thesis writing would involve de-identification of participants and employ the use of pseudonyms. I informed potential participants that data would only be used for the stated purposes - exploring student experience and informing curriculum development.

In order to minimise potential psychological and social risks to participants I made students aware that participation in the research was voluntary. The nature, purpose and requirements of the research were made clear to students in both in the information provided to participants at the time of consent and at the beginning of focus groups and interviews. Information to participants clearly outlined my role as a music teacher in the music department, and although I had taught many of the students prior to data collection no participants were recruited from classes I was teaching at the time. Focus groups and interviews were conducted according to the principles of respect and justice to all participants. Participants were informed that they were free to make comments and answer questions as they wished and were not asked to discuss issues or areas they were uncomfortable about. Participants were informed that they could discontinue the focus group or interview discussion at any time. Participants were informed that the focus group and interview discussions would be taped and that transcripts would be used at a later date as part of data analysis and presentation. Finally, I informed participants that they would not be identified in any data presentation and that any published analysis of data would de-identify participants.

My original ethics application acknowledged the need to maintain awareness of my role/bias as teacher and coordinator in terms of my impact on project development, direction of research, data interpretation and impact on student

responses. I intended to remain constantly reflective of my roles and purpose throughout the research and writing. At this planning stage of the research, I experienced 'ethics' as a required process to be navigated in order to be able to begin the collection of data. I applied for and was granted ethics approval to conduct the research under the conditions outlined above. In hindsight, I associated this process with meeting university guidelines concerning risk and the importance of a personal sense of care and sensitivity in the conduct of research.

Reflections: Throughout candidature and the gaining of ethics approval I saw myself as a reasonably just and fair teacher and person. I trusted my instincts to act fairly and sensitively with participants. On reflection I've learned that ethics of research is a far more complex and important notion than I conceived as I set out on this investigation

I came to this research with several critical opinions of 'traditional' formal music educational cultures. These stances were developed through a number of my own experiences as a student and through my work as a music teacher in a range of roles. However, as a beginning researcher I felt I had to keep these views hidden and establish a tone of objectivity in my analysis and writing. I believed that to do otherwise would be to compromise the validity of my findings. However, I was later inspired to read that 'qualitative researchers acknowledge their personal subjectivities and make their assumptions explicit in their reporting' (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 35). In declaring that amongst my aims was the desire to improve conditions in music education, I came to understand that I should admit that I firmly believed (rather than perhaps coyly implied) that much of the tried and tested music curricula and pedagogy was negatively impacting developing musicians. I also had to acknowledge that I was critical of an over-reliance on statistical data to describe, and drive, the student experience both locally at Victoria University and in the wider tertiary education field. I had to openly declare that I felt music and creative arts more generally had been pushed to the edges of all levels of educational curricula and had become woefully under resourced and deprioritised. These affirmations formed a part of my attempt to let 'readers know what we believe and what we feel...' (Pelias, 2015, p. 610). In allowing myself inside the research process and in

admitting my political and moral stances, I was actively attempting to find ways forward for music education and research. These acknowledgements assisted me to explore my beliefs, opinions and ethical positions as both educator and researcher.

This intense and personal investigative process has led me to conclude that qualitative research is political and characterised by an inexorable set of moral and political considerations. Teachers, researchers and students in formal educational contexts move, think and act with degrees of agency afforded to them by virtue of a long history of power dynamics and distributions. Institutionalised education tends to operate on hierarchical structures that allow for the accrual and maintenance of power within a top to bottom paradigm. For example, as a researcher and teacher I came to this inquiry with inherent power in relation to the students and participants in this investigation.

Acknowledging my power in this process of inquiry accords with the proposition that 'teachers (and researchers) must admit that they are in a position of authority and then demonstrate that authority in their actions in support of students' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 165). Those tasked with the job of educating can do this by 'relinquish(ing) the authority as truth providers...and assum(ing) the mature authority of facilitators of student enquiry and problem posing...(so) ...students gain freedom...the ability to become self-directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge' (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 165). Having initially satisfied the uniform ethical guidelines set down by university policies, I found myself thinking about why I was really doing this research. My aims became increasingly clear to me as I talked to students and read the literature within the relevant academic communities. I was spurred onwards by Pelias (2015, p. 610) who reminded researchers to continually ask what our explorations and storytelling are trying to achieve, and for whom? My research was about voicing the unheard student voice and understanding their experiences in the context of exploring tertiary music education. It became increasingly clear that I wanted to create an opportunity for students to share their challenges, in addition to having capacities and strengths acknowledged as well. This thinking was an attempt to bring a more authentic ethical practice to my investigation, to own up to students, about what I was trying to do. I came

to see the importance of continuous reflective ethical practice in my role as both teacher and researcher. I found I was attempting to apply an ethical standpoint in my research that incorporated a 'transformative egalitarianism, attention to the problems of representation, and continued examination of power orientations' (Lincoln and Cannella, 2009, p. 279)

I was continually challenged by the actual and theoretical differences between formal university procedures relating to ethics and the day to day ethical considerations of the teacher/researcher. Berger (2001) was interested in exploring the relationship between the observer and the observed and how researchers might use reflexivity in methodological frameworks to bring both parties closer together. Conscious reflexive attention within the investigative process, she argued, had the potential to alter the traditional power structures between those who actively investigate and those who are passively investigated. By acknowledging power distributions and including self-stories in the discussions of other data I attempted to establish a focus on power dynamics and upon the relationship between researcher and those being researched. I wanted to create a functional way of 'acting ethically' that augmented the necessary agreement to act ethically by adhering to the uniform guidelines of a university policy.

Berger (2001) was also interested in the importance of establishing an empathetic understanding of the subjects of ethnographic research. She saw empathy as a crucial part of an ethical approach to research. Ethical approaches can, and should, apply to the localised contexts of various research projects but I've also come to see that they relate to the role of qualitative inquiry more generally as an empathetic, caring and respectful method of investigation and inquiry (Hultberg, 2005)

Berger (2001) explored the positioning of researcher into telling and writing about the participant stories she was telling. I felt like I needed to tell the stories of learning about the research process in addition to the outcomes of the research, but I struggled to articulate a legitimate or clear reason why this was so important. Reed-Danahay (2009) has acknowledged the complexity and tension inherent within the dual roles of insider and outsider in the research process. I came to feel that, despite my confusion between me as researcher

and the research itself, there was merit in struggling through. My intention was to achieve a kind of balance, or to 'create a more equitable relationship between the researcher and those she or he studies by subjecting the researched and the researcher to an analytical lens...(and) to explore a topic or research question more fully by including the researcher's experience of it' (Chase, 2011, p. 423). My writing and analysis of the vignettes situated me as both the teacher and researcher in the narrative inquiry. By writing me into the stories about musicians' experiences in communities and institutions I was tackling the real ethics of my research. I strove to get as close as I could to answers or at least some suggested ways forward.

2.7. Interpretation and evaluation

'And if we'd get up off our knees

Why then we'd see the forest for the trees'

['Gold in them hills', Ron Sexsmith](#)

Initial plans: I initially planned to use iterative thematic analysis of focus group and interview transcripts (Fereday and Muir - Chocrane, 2006) to identify themes and then code these themes into categories (Kervin et al., 2006). I reasoned that autoethnographic inquiry might defy a strict interpretative approach given that this kind of research tended to use less specific methods of data analysis. I intended to analyse my own writing by looking for, accuracy, sincerity and representation (Griffiths and Macleod, 2008). I wanted to identify key ideas and attempt to uncover the 'essence' within the writing (Gouzouasis et al., 2008). I then planned to collate findings from each of the methodologies to draw of series of conclusions. I intended to draw the different analyses together using triangulation which I understood 'involved the comparison of multiple data sources to build a coherent analysis of data...where different perspectives that emerge from the gathered data are compared and contrasted (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 87).

I listened to all interviews and focus groups a number of times. I transcribed the interviews and focus groups which was a slow and lengthy process but had the advantage of building familiarity with the tone and substance of the stories (Kervin et al., 2006). I then read over and over the data. This was the

familiarisation process, asking 'what is really going on here?' reminiscent of Goffman's ground breaking work in experiential analysis (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 141). I then attempted to create emerging and common areas of information. This was my first attempt at organising the data to make sense of what I had gathered. I then coded the transcripts into categories, and subsequently into sub categories, attempting to organise the data into more manageable blocks to assist with the process of 'logico-inductive analysis' (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 142). I then entered the chosen passages into the categories and sub categories. This involved creating the narrative or prose out of the passages of conversation. I next ordered each passage within the categories and sub categories and ordered the sub categories within each category. I named and re-named chapters and sub chapter headings. At this stage I was trying very hard to simply present an ordered and meaningful presentation of the data rather than an analysis or discussion of what this actually meant. I planned to interpret the data to inform the discussion, including the linking of those interpretations with literature that supported and discussed similar interpretations. As I have related previously it was at this stage that the neat, linear analytical approach began to unravel.

Reflections: I found it straightforward to read and find common themes within the data. I was able to present this information in coherent and clear ways as the data presentation chapters. I attempted to analyse those stories and data. That is, I thought about them a great deal. This was the beginning of a 'working interpretive document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense out of what has been learned' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 15). However, what did analysing writing the data with the objective of accuracy, sincerity and representation really mean? Indeed as Kervin et al. (2006, p. 139 and p. 142) remarked 'researchers often note the chaos and complexities associated with analysing data within a qualitative design' and that 'it can be a very frustrating time for researchers.' The process analysis, as it involves interpretation and evaluation, evolved very slowly for me, but eventually provided 'teachable moments' that occurred following these confusing times trying to write the discussion chapters: the realisation that I needed to read more deeply and widely; the discovery of an epistemological paradigm I felt represented my

ethical and moral identity but that also applied to the narratives I was attempting to unpack, and the search and identification of my voice within the stories and the investigative process. The writing and thinking process began to coalesce, as I searched for interest, authenticity and honesty – my stories and those of all of my participants.

I came across a passage from Pelias (2011, p. 666) comparing ‘flat’ and ‘engaging’ inquiries. He describes ‘flat’ pieces as pleasure less; ostentatious; disconnected from work it ought to be related to; abstract; above and across the individual; familiarly structured; and ‘forgets the vibrant relationship of form and content’. I thought immediately of the notion in music, as in my writing, of form and function. Flat writing had: simple answers; where the author is invisible; were passion less; apolitical; accepting of normative histories and stories; and claims to be the truth. In clear contrast, Pelias (2011) argued, engaging writing and exploration is: moreish; incorporates and entertains other ideas; promotes further thinking and discussion; highlights the content of the discussion, rather than privileging the form; struggles, yet manages to offer ‘cautionary’ insights; acknowledges the self in the exploration; is political; passionate; creates new spaces; ‘open doors’; is conditional; and is empathetic. I was enlivened by these characteristics of engaging writing and came to understand that these were the traits of effective and useful analysis that resonated with me, the aspects that I have tried to provide in my writing. In stark contrast, when I think of much of the quantitative evaluation that drives ‘reforms’, curriculum, education and policy at every organisational level (supporting the neoliberal conditions for modern education ‘industries’ and ‘markets’) I am reminded of the characteristics of Pelias’s ‘flat’ inquiry...

2.8. Coda: Concluding remarks

Amongst the final thoughts as I completed this chapter were lingering anxieties about an autoethnographic approach to this methodology section. Did the writing expose me and my academic abilities as somehow deficient? How could I have not known some of the fundamental things I should have? However, in keeping with Pelias’ notions of engaging writing I’m hoping that an honest reflection trumps a partially descriptive account...

Writing a thesis is far clearer after the process has finished. This may sound simplistic and I would hazard that it may be a common realisation for doctoral students. However there was for me, as there may be for others, an implicit expectation that we should know what we are doing, and exactly how we should go about it, before we start the investigative journey; that we should have read and understood the relevant literature; that we ought to know how to accurately and thoroughly analyse the data we have not yet collected.

These ideas might have implications for how students are instructed to undertake research and also about how *structure* of a thesis is taught. I've come to see that the thesis process need not be linear and organised, but indeed can be messy and disorganised. Structure is open to questioning and interpretation based upon individual and contextual exigencies. I needed to find my own 'teachable moments', the 'right' times as a researcher, student, teacher and musician. Others may benefit from understanding they can find their own idiosyncratic learning moments also.

The following two chapters detail the data, or stories, gathered from participants to this research through the methodological approaches outlined herein. Chapter 3 'Time remembered' presents the experiences of the participants prior to tertiary studies – their early encounters with music and their progress through many varied music communities. Chapter 4 'Guided by voices' details the challenges and triumphs of participants as they negotiated tertiary music studies.

Chapter 3. **Time remembered: Participant music backgrounds**

3.1. Prelude

['Time remembered', Bill Evans](#)

This chapter presents data collected from three separate cohorts of participants at Victoria University in this investigation: students in vocational education music programs (= VE 1); students undertaking music as part of a Bachelor of Education (=HE 1) and; students who recently graduated from the Bachelor of Music course (= HE 2). Specific detail of participants is contained in Appendix 1. Focus groups and 28 individual in depth interviews were conducted to investigate the music backgrounds and identities of all participants.

Responses in this chapter relate music experiences prior to tertiary music study at Victoria University. The chapter details narratives of first encounters with music and how respondents came to identify themselves as 'musicians'. Participants shared stories about the communities that nurtured their musical selves and learning that took place in these communities. The chapter concludes with descriptions of how and why participants came to Victoria University to study music. Data is presented collectively in order to reflect a range of common experiences across the cohorts. Sub chapter headings are presented with song titles reflecting the tone of the sub chapter, using language as music - music as narrative, metaphors to help 'build a coherent narrative within life story' (Keller-Cohen and Gordon, 2003, p. 31).

3.2. Music experiences prior to Victoria University

*It's a very ancient saying, but a true and honest thought,
That if you become a teacher, by your pupils you'll be taught.*

*'As a teacher I've been learning, you'll forgive me if I boast
And I've now become an expert, on the subject I like most - getting to know
you.'*

['Getting to Know You', Rogers and Hammerstein](#)

Participants spoke about music activities undertaken prior to coming to study music at Victoria University. They shared first memories and experiences in music and related stories describing the spaces and places they associated with music activity. Questions were deliberately open ended to engender wide ranging discussion of personal music histories.

3.2.1. Family and the home

Participants spoke about growing up in musical families and being encouraged in music by family members. Parents figured often in decisions to learn music or in early music activities. Some parents wanted their children to take up music as they had done as children or believed that studying music would be beneficial. Parents paid for tuition and drove their children to and from music lessons. Parents took their children to music festivals like the annual Port Fairy Folk Festival. Kyrie declared:

‘I guess I was lucky enough to have parents who thought music was valuable. Mum and dad were really thoughtful and intelligent people who looked ahead and thought about what they wanted for their kids.’

Fathers figured prominently in early music influences. Several participants remembered their dads playing guitar and many experimented with instruments lying about the house. Cora happily recounted her father singing and playing guitar while the rest of the family joined in. The family recorded some of these sessions and still listened to them. Finn’s interest in music was sparked by his father’s guitar playing at their local Church.

Graham told me a story about his father, who had been a guitar player in a local folk band who played virtually every night of the week in local venues and social gatherings. Graham went to as many gigs as possible hoping he might one day be just like his dad. His father taught him a few chords but seemed unwilling to go any further. Graham couldn’t understand his father’s reluctance until he later learned that his mother had been upset her son had wanted to learn guitar; she had not wanted him to become as absent as his father.

Some remembered music being played around the house by their parents. Gordon’s father was into ‘old Caribbean’ rock and folk music. He played in

bands and had a large music collection that Gordon explored as a child. Alana recalled the music of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole and Aretha Franklin wafting through the house. Music preferences were influenced by the music that parents listened to. Parents acknowledged and supported early interests in music. Andrew's parents were initially concerned about the Heavy Metal music that he was into but eventually tolerated it because they saw how much the music meant to him. Parents bought instruments and equipment for their children. Cora recalled:

'I got a Casio keyboard from grandad in Grade 2. Mum took that keyboard with me to friends' houses so she could show how I could play 'Advance Australia Fair'. She was very proud as a new immigrant to Australia.'

However, not all parents played a part in early music experiences. Belinda lamented:

'My parents did not encourage me or influence me to take music further – I wish they did.'

Discussions elicited passionate memories and discussions about listening to music. Participants listened to music on the radio, in cars, in their bedrooms, 'everywhere' and 'all the time'. Caitlin had fond memories of watching 'Video Hits' every Saturday morning and Caroline's eyes lit up when recounting countless hours spent in her bedroom listening to Hillary Duff and the Spice Girls on her stereo.

3.2.2. Religious communities and organisations

Twelve participants from across the three cohorts related music experiences associated with Pentecostal Churches, such as the Hill Song Church, Australian Christian Churches, Church of Christ and the Word of Life. These church communities involved a great deal of music performance and interaction. Churches offered music 'ministries' to facilitate praise and worship through musical activities. Music performances ranged from congregational hymn singing to instrumental music and bands playing original and cover songs conveying religious sentiments and messages. Participants played in bands on

Sundays in front of the church members and practised with members of the band assisted by church youth leaders and mentors.

Most students attended Church with their families. Cora's family immigrated to Australia when she was four years old and quickly became connected to a Pentecostal Church. By the time she was 13, Cora had joined the music team and sang in front of the congregation every Sunday. Alex was encouraged to play guitar at the Church his family attended and later went on to play drums for all the church bands.

3.2.3. Community music programs

Participants belonged to various music community organisations and programs, such as choir groups, local orchestras, community youth groups, amateur theatre companies and local community music programs. Caitlin spoke fondly about successfully trying out for an established Melbourne choir group as an eight year old primary school student. Belinda remembered her time with a local talent school as a blur of shopping centres and pink flouncy dresses. She had loved the singing but sometimes felt that the all-girls choir were a bit like 'performing seals'.

Effie joined a community orchestra when she was in Year 8 and stayed with the group until she was 18. She attended weekly rehearsals and performed regularly in concerts. Bridie took part in a range of orchestral community music programs. She was thrilled to be invited to join an ensemble group that performed at The Awaki auditorium and Hamer Hall and also enjoyed an all-girls Jazz program taught by renowned female Jazz composers.

3.2.4. School music activities

A majority of participants engaged with music at primary and/or secondary school. Students sang in school choirs, played in school bands and orchestras, and took instrumental lessons. They chose classroom music at High School, in some cases undertaking or completing VCE or VET music units in Years 11 and 12. Many played in bands formed with friends in school and out of school music programs.

Some participants took instrumental lessons as part of school music programs. Ben learned guitar until he left High School in Year 10 declaring that:

‘I did guitar because I thought it would be easy and it was the only thing at school I was good at.’

Gordon discovered bass guitar through a mate who was an accomplished drummer. They would sneak into the school rehearsal rooms at lunchtime to jam. The music coordinator heard Gordon and his friend playing and invited them to join the school’s Jazz ensemble where they learned quickly and participated in rehearsals and performances. Graham recalled that at his school playing music was very highly regarded and reserved for a fortunate few who showed dedication and aptitude. He felt he was fortunate to be able to play in bands and guitar trios. Students were involved with school musical productions as part of bands and ensembles. Caroline recalled joining the school band and going on a school band trip to New Zealand. She was the first person in her family to go overseas. Many participants spoke about singing in choirs at school where opportunities for performances at assemblies, choir camps and overseas trips were available.

Eight participants completed either Group or Solo VCE Units 3 and 4 in either voice or instruments. Four participants completed VET Units 3 and 4 in music performance. VCE and VET music programs involved ensemble encompassing brass ensembles, full and string orchestras, Jazz bands and rock bands. Two participants studied music at pre tertiary level before coming to Victoria University. Harry completed a Certificate IV at private college because his school did not offer a VCE music program and Gordon completed a Certificate III in music performance at a TAFE college.

3.2.5. Private music lessons

Most participants had some experience of private music lessons. Four students undertook Australian Music Examiners Board (AMEB) exams in piano, violin and guitar. Kyrie reached AMEB Grade 5 in piano. Fabien completed AMEB Grade 2 whilst paying for his own lessons working in a bakery for \$7.00 an hour. Effie completed AMEB Grade 6 in violin with the help of 10 years of private lessons with the same instrumental teacher.

Many respondents took private lessons but did not sit for AMEB or music qualifications. Private lessons took place at the homes of music teachers or through 'music schools', mostly running out of music retail stores. Djava finally convinced her parents to organise lessons for when she was 15 years old. She wished she had started earlier and she tried to make up for lost time by practising for hours every day in her bedroom. Some reported having to pursue private singing lessons because school music programs did not offer individual tuition.

Participants attended private music lessons because they actively wanted to learn music, rather than being forced to do so. Effie's family was not musical but she was adamant from an early age that she wanted to learn the violin and 'nagged and nagged' until her parents gave in.

3.2.6. Bands and band scenes

Many students were involved in various kinds of bands. Bands provided opportunities to create original music and hang around with friends. Music levels and skills were often considered low or even irrelevant. Finn proudly declared every band he played in was 'terrible'. Some bands were part of larger or recognised music scenes. Some bands gigged at local venues, some at parties and weddings whilst other bands didn't perform publically at all, preferring to remain in the garage or rehearsal room.

Dylan started gigging when he was 15 years old. His bands played local festivals and competitions around Melbourne. Iggy played in an 'Indy rock' band with friends from school at youth events and won local community band competitions. Andrew started a Heavy Metal band when he was fifteen. His best friend started as the drummer despite never having played before. The band played hundreds of gigs around Melbourne including many well-known venues. They wrote and recorded their own material and independently released their own CDs. Andrew declared:

'...that (the band) was my life - we had own merchandise and t-shirts and hundreds of kids came to watch us.'

3.2.7. Other music exploration

Participants experimented with music on their own, appreciating the freedom of experiencing new sounds and feelings in their own space and time. Cora remembered knowing that the family piano was out of tune and feeling frustrated by the sound that the instrument made, despite being only six. Hung remarked that:

‘...one of the first, and best, things that I ever noticed in my life was being able to hear melodies.’

Helena grew up in a strict religious household and did not listen to commercial radio at all until she was fifteen when she was allowed to listen to songs outside of Church. She recalled:

‘I started listening to radio in my room – things like Mariah Carey and Shania Twain, which wasn’t the same as the church message, but I was just seeing what was out there. They sang about love, war and peace, the world, about being yourself and enjoying life.’

Dylan also grew up in a religious family who frowned upon ‘popular’ music at home. Through furtive experimentation Dylan fell in love with radio and developed music tastes that changed according to the different radio stations he found. The music inspired a desire to play the music himself. Dylan discovered that he could look up music charts, bands and repertoire on the internet to help teach himself how to play.

Many participants discussed teaching themselves instruments. Cora taught herself the guitar by slowly learning to play what she heard from others and the radio. She learned chords by patterns and also learned to play the drums because the church band had no drummer. Graham taught himself guitar by attempting to emulate friends in his country of origin. Graham and his friends learned that music could be used as a secret language of protest against the political regime in power. Newly arrived in Australia he learned English by listening to Slim Dusty and Paul Kelly listening for colloquialisms and intonation.

Many students recalled that they had always sung – anywhere and everywhere, including in the shower where the acoustic and privacy conditions were perfect.

However, singing was often not considered a serious musical pursuit, but rather 'just something we did'. Caroline recalled with pride how her friends and family praised her voice. She declared that singing was '...just what I liked to do and is part of who I am now'.

Participants grew music interest and skill and discovered favourite bands by attending gigs. They reminisced passionately about memorable events, venues and festivals. These were described as 'coming of age' experiences where participants met friends, fell in love and danced together to live, and loud, music.

All participants spoke with passion and in great detail about their childhood and early music experiences. Many experiences occurred within self-described 'communities' where music played a large part in cultural activities. Speaking about first connections with music and the development of musical lives and loves stimulated further discussion about what these communities were like and what defined them as communities.

3.3. Definitions and descriptions of music communities

'Why don't we sing this song all together?

Open our heads let the pictures come

And if we close all our eyes together

Then we will see where we all come from'

['Sing This All Together', The Rolling Stones](#)

3.3.1. Religious communities

Twelve participants spoke in detail about their experiences in church or religious communities and role of music in these communities. Some small groups formed around church bands and ensembles as part of the church 'praise and worship' activities. Discussion was divided on whether music was for religious purposes only or was in fact a selling point for those more interested in music than religion themes.

Some church communities acted as spaces and places for maintaining ethnic links for those new to Australia. Alex's family immigrated when he was two

years old. The family gravitated towards a local Pentecostal Church formed with members from his family's cultural and religious diaspora. Alex believed that those new to Australia felt a strong need to belong because:

'...some people like to stick to own race so they can relate with food, language and life experiences of migrating to Australia.'

The Church Alex's family attended offered a music ministry that played upbeat music as well as ballads, and the many musicians played different styles like Jazz, Latin and Blues. Members of the Church could volunteer or be nominated into the music ministry by other members. Alex was invited to get involved with the ministry and this initiated his music journey:

'I didn't want to (play music) at first but I like it now. I had always been interested in music but never playing or anything like that.'

Association with Pentecostal communities typically involved the whole family attending services. Culture and structure of religious worship differed from Church to Church but tended to consist of sermons followed by singing and music. Music was often based on gospel worship songs detailing particular religious or spiritual messages. Much of the music originated out of 'Hillsong', a large Pentecostal Church associated with The Australian Christian Churches network and well known for developing strong music ministries and Christian song writers. Churches often involved performances by the church's live band. Cora became a leader of the music ministry at Church when she was thirteen. She proudly declared:

'I took things seriously and oversaw the team. I chose songs, prepared the program for service, provide music for people and organised the players.'

Dylan attended a small Pentecostal Church with his family and identified the Church as his primary communal experience in childhood and teenage years. He played in various church bands and described an active youth music culture. Dylan developed a greater connection with people through the 'Greater Church of Christ' networks. He attended big music and worship events, some with over four thousand people. Helena declared:

‘...my outlet for music was Church, which was much more exciting than what was happening at school.’

Dylan reasoned many young people came to these events because ‘traditional’ church experiences did not provide a contemporary approach to music. He told me that he and his fellow worshippers:

‘...wanted to provide more modern songs and styles and live music for people because they didn’t see a lot of live music.’

Attendance at large music praise and worship events was common for young people involved in Pentecostal church communities. Most declared that the primary function of music at the events was to facilitate worship aspects of communities and that the ‘music was about God’. In contrast, Finn grew up attending a Pentecostal Church in New South Wales but reflected that although he was compelled to attend Church, music had been the real, and only, interest.

3.3.2. High School music communities

There was wide ranging discussion about the nature and differences within High Schools music communities. A few participants spoke positively about their school music programs. George attended a private secondary college and praised the music program boasting a large purpose built music auditorium and many specialist music teachers. Music was a popular area of study for students at the school. Music was compulsory in Year 7 and could be then taken as an elective through to the extensive VCE music program. George detailed different school music ensembles and the program’s emphasis on music technology. Students were able to record original compositions created in music classes. George exclaimed:

‘I enjoyed music at school – I highlighted it in my diary and I would say Yeah got music next!’

Others detailed less formal experiences of school music. Graham’s High School offered no formal music program but rather a series of dancing and folk bands. The teachers did not teach theory classes but led the performance groups where students picked up music by ear. There was a teacher’s music ensemble that invited the more talented students to attend. Graham developed close

relationships with the music teachers at his High School through these opportunities. Belinda's High School did offer a music program but so few chose to undertake music in Year 11 that the school decided it could not afford to offer VCE music units in Year 12. Nevertheless she spoke enthusiastically about practising songs with the other music students at lunchtimes and after school. Andrew found other students at his High School who were into Heavy Metal music:

'...so we started a little group of freaks who then all became instrumentalists through this.'

Many students descriptions of High School communities were quite negative. Alana described the music department at her local High School as one music room with an old upright piano and no other real instruments. She felt that the music teachers were very limited in their capacity to teach and wondered whether they had music qualifications at all. The school could not offer VCE music which profoundly disappointed her. She reflected that:

'...the music department always got funds cut and it still does. Music was not treated like a serious subject. It seems the story of most schools' music lives.'

Delaney also lamented that her High School did not offer a substantial music program. Delaney was passionate about learning music and felt she has a natural talent for it. She believed the standard of music education in her Year 12 class was equivalent only to a junior program. She observed a lack of passion and care with in the scant teaching staff. The school was not able to offer music ensembles for Delaney to participate in – something she would have loved to have done as a passionate and experienced multi-instrumentalist.

Some students spoke about music programs consisting only of private instrumental lessons organised through the school. Others recounted poor teaching, lack of facilities with few choosing to take music electives. Harry wanted to continue with music at his High School after Year 10 but the school offered no Year 11 and 12 music program at all so he went to a TAFE college to undertake VET Music 2 and 3. Harry felt that:

‘High School music was not really a community because there was no real music program established there. There were no facilities, no bands, just a small class sometimes. There was no culture of music.’

3.3.3. Community music programs

Many students detailed experiences in local and community music programs. Bridie spoke fondly of various youth music programs she became involved with. She highlighted the freedom of expression and opportunity to explore that the programs offered. Bridie particularly enjoyed playing music with a group of young people who were clearly as passionate about music as she was. Alannah attended a private performance company, and spoke passionately about her experience of touring through America, visiting Disneyworld and performing with the group off Broadway. She was with the group for four years and believed the rehearsals and commitment to professionalism performing made for a strong community. Effie’s belonged to a community orchestra with three separate orchestras – junior, middle and senior. As participants improved and grew they moved up from one orchestra to the next. Effie remembered that:

‘The conductors in my orchestra played in the senior orchestra so that was inspiring. It was just one big company. It really felt like a community – we grew up knowing each other and made close friends who remain so.’

3.3.4. Melbourne’s music communities

‘Melbourne is amazing. Like it’s, this situation, where you can’t not be exposed to music. It’s everywhere you go, something’s going on musically. The city, suburbs, anywhere, music’s going on all the time. There are posters everywhere. You can find any music you like – Spanish, Bluegrass, Reggae...buskers playing over one another. Everyone is drawn together in Melbourne through music.’ (Harry)

Like many of the participants, Harry was passionate about the variety of live music opportunities in Melbourne. Emma grew up in Queensland and moved to Melbourne after completing High School. She was surprised and delighted to find a vibrant and ‘friendly’ music scene. She immediately gained a sense of

belonging through playing and attending gigs with a wide range of other musicians.

Participants reported a variety of 'niche' or distinctive music communities within the larger Melbourne music community. Ben told me about his involvement with what he called the 'western suburbs' bands. This community comprised kids who were often from broken homes and low socioeconomic backgrounds. Ben described himself and the other kids as 'outsiders'. These kids, aged between 15 and 18, played in one another's bands and all attended each other's gigs. Some students recounted stories about other sizeable, but localised, scenes where the (male) members of bands 'and their girlfriends', hung around together, drinking, talking 'strutting their stuff'. This community was described as image driven and characterised by friendship and camaraderie rather than by music. Music communities were formed from kids and young adults who taught one another music. The kids who had learned guitar often then became teachers and taught their friends or family of those who had first taught them. The connections ranged from suburb to suburb in a seemingly complex web of people who knew people, who knew people.

Participants discussed music communities defined by their identification with a particular sub-genre of music that would only 'get air' through the availability of community radio such as 3RRR and 3PBS. People who listened to certain types of music on community radio were 'like-minded' and adopted common cultural traits such as fashion. Members of genre based music communities had 'emotional connections' with the music and the messages contained within. There was agreement that liking a certain music sub-genre bound people together. It was even suggested that the more unknown the sub-genre of music was, the stronger the ties between members of the community – almost as if the members were uniting to defend criticisms of their 'unusual' music tastes and associations.

Participants reflected generally that music communities were created from people who interest in or connection to music. There was philosophical discussion about the role of creativity in people's lives. People who were interested in creating music were bound to be drawn together into various types of communities. Discussion explored the idea that music communities need not

necessarily involve only those people who play music. Music communities could be 'people seeking out music together rather than just music as a distraction'. They studied music informally at home through the internet or books, and discussed every aspect of bands and artists they admired. Members were 'picky' and discussed at length reasons why a particular band or genre was worth listening to. People who explored music in depth identified as being 'serious' about music. Students agreed that there was a distinction between the wider community where people used music incidentally and for entertainment only and music communities where people engaged in 'active listening'. There was consensus music acted as a vehicle for membership for belonging in particular music communities. Andrew commented:

'...there's an experiential element that separates a music community from where people just listen to music incidentally within the general community.'

Ben extricated himself from the 'destructive lifestyle' of the 'western suburbs' band scene and met a singer who knew a number of other musicians. He described these musicians as professionals who wanted to have a career in music and 'not just muck about'. He described this group as tight knit community that was welcoming of anyone with a serious musical intent and passion for music. In describing a music community he had been involved with Andrew said:

'It wasn't a traditional community and without realising it you are a part of community of music, but it's really just what you are doing.'

Participants painted vivid pictures of music communities created by passions and interests in spirituality, music study and a range of music related activities involving music performance and preferences. These communities were characterised by freedom of creative practice and expression and a sense of belonging. Participants next reflected upon particular benefits of belonging to music communities.

3.4. Benefits of belonging to a music community

'But it all amounts to nothing

If together we don't stand'

['There is power in the union', Billy Bragg](#)

Respondents highlighted the benefits of music communities that provided the conditions for establishing self-awareness and as understanding of music directions and interests. In addition, music communities were seen to foster greater security and comfort, stronger friendship circles and more authentic experiences of music engagement.

3.4.1. Belonging and identity

Students highlighted belonging and identify as beneficial aspects of music community involvement. Music informed perceptions of how participants saw themselves as individuals. Identity and music became inextricably linked. Andrew was heavily involved in Heavy Metal music from the age of 13 and believed:

'It (Heavy Metal music) connected with me. Music was all I had and to know that someone knew how I felt...a lot of it was dark music obviously but it connected with me.'

George began playing clarinet at school but longed to learn guitar so he could emulate his favourite rock guitar heroes. Listening to rock music with mates and playing guitar was the first time George remembered thinking about who he was. Similarly, Helena felt:

'There's something about music, inside of me, that I feel is a really valuable part of me.'

Participants involved in religious communities described the importance of music to spiritual identity. Elle believed the music activities at Church helped her to develop a sense of identity 'because music tells your story.' Isabelle explained that:

'...because I'm a Christian I believe what I sing and it portrays what I believe in. It's part of my identity.'

Alex felt that playing music was something that came from inside. He believed that as his spirituality developed he discovered that God was directing him to be a church leader using his love of, and ability with, music. Hung argued that the parishioner identities should be seen in a spiritual and communal, rather than individual, context: Hung claimed:

‘The best part is playing for God, not for you. People are looking at God, we are just the bridge for them to get to God – the music only has a little bit to do with it.’

Participants described music as a place to belong and feel accepted and safe. Andrew’s involvement with Heavy Metal music provided an escape and the opportunity to explore different ideas from those of his family and church community. Andrew confided in me that emotional displays such as anger were not tolerated at home and that he felt ‘oppressed’. He felt music gave him the ability to express his anger in a safe and effective way. Andrew thought ‘his music’ allowed him to imagine other spaces and places:

‘Heavy Metal was a magical world I could be involved in. If you could feel comfortable with dark ideas then what else was there to fear? It was almost a way of feeling safe.’

Ben experienced some very real challenges in a splintered family home. He described how friends in his band scene provided a lifeline and offered a roof over his head and comfort in a time of great need. Graham had a large family where he felt there was no room for him to flourish and for him ‘school was like a second home because I spent the most time there.’ Belinda recalled with pride the feeling she got from belonging to her school’s small but tight music community. People would refer to her and her friends as ‘the music guys’.

Some participants felt alienated from their school communities. Church and community music groups were able to fill the need to belonging and acceptance. Both Alana and Helena felt isolated at school. They described gravitating towards church communities because they were able to make friendships and have fun. Such communities were ‘inclusive’ and ‘welcoming’. Effie described the local orchestral program as:

‘...a great community – that had a different feel to school – we felt closer and it was really comforting.’

3.4.2. Acceptance

Acceptance was identified as a benefit of being part of a music community. Delaney shared a story of being asked to join her High School rock band. She had always loved singing but had never performed publically. Delaney recalled:

‘It must have gone well, because everyone was like ‘why didn’t you tell us you sing’ and I was like ‘you never asked’! It was a good thing to be finally accepted into that community as a musician.’

Music communities were described as ‘welcoming’ and new members were welcomed readily and without question. Students spoke of communities as comfortable places to live, learn and interact in. Music became the ideal vehicle for discussing emerging emotional concerns such as love, life, loss and desire. Emma remembered her school music community as:

‘...a family where everyone looked after one another and where people never put anyone down and always tried to have fun.’

3.4.3. Support

Music communities provided various kinds of support for participants. Alex experienced his church community as a ‘supportive environment’ at a particularly challenging time in his life:

‘The youth leaders have helped me and they taught me too. There was a lot of support for me doing drums – they noticed the change in me and that I was not so depressed anymore. I got lots of positive comments from the community.’

Cora recounted how she had felt pressure to engage in the ‘risky’ behaviour of her classmates at school. The Church provided the moral support for her to say ‘no’. Cora and her friends began to perform music at their Church with messages of resisting peer pressure as a way of expressing support and guidance for one another. Through her church community, ethical and moral boundaries could be established and lived out

Effie talked about the death of her mother when she was 13. Her community orchestra members gathered around her and provided close care of her. She felt that they had assisted her in working through her grief. Effie recalled the junior orchestra conductor as being a kind and loving person who inspired her musically and personally. Other members of the orchestra 'were all different' but were joined in their mutual support for one another's interests and challenges. Caroline detailed growing up in a small country town with a close group of friends who played in bands together. Her friends praised her voice and encouraged her to sing more. Caroline commented that she might never have continued in music without this friendship and support.

3.4.4. Confidence, self-worth and achievement

Being accepted into music communities like school bands and church groups inspired confidence. Elle recalled:

'I didn't sing in front of the school until Year 12 when I was asked to do the lead for the school choir. Being asked, being a part of that group, gave me the confidence that I was good enough to sing. It gave me confidence full stop!'

Music communities provided opportunities to achieve musical goals which in turn led to a growth in overall confidence. Alana believed her church music ministry helped her develop musical goals including leading the children's church music program. As a church music leader Cora organised outings, study and engaged in counselling. Cora claimed that:

'...achieving that level of responsibility makes you step up to the mark and gives you confidence that you can actually do all that.'

Iggy's time spent in local rock bands gave him the confidence to go on to study music. Bridie recalled her family's pride at being chosen to play at Hamer Hall. The event convinced her that she was performing at a high enough level to attempt music as a career.

Music community experiences assisted in overcoming shyness and reluctance to perform music. Iggy admitted he:

‘...was quite shy but music was a tool to step out of my shell a bit and do something I was comfortable with in a way I would not normally be.’

Belinda experienced chronic shyness as a young child and believed singing in the church choir helped her overcome it in later life. Farrah thought that being the ‘front man’ in several different rock bands helped him to become a confident performer and person. Emma’s music community expected the students to be responsible for their own music practice. This gave her the confidence to direct her own music path. Succeeding in music at school made Belinda me feel ‘important’.

3.4.5. Friendship and music

Friendship was identified as one of the most important benefits of belonging to music communities. Attending practice and rehearsals were enjoyable because it involved hanging out with and making friends. Music communities were places to meet other people interested in music. Graham commented that he met other musicians as he travelled to remote communities with folk bands and developed friendships based on similar musical and political interests. Kyrie believed he developed relationships with people he may not have otherwise because of his involvement with the school music community. Effie described various community music programs where she got to know a lot of people because they were passionate about music. She remarked:

‘...we had common interests and would help each other out. We had music camps which were always heaps of fun, playing music and making friends.’

Bands provided places and opportunities for people to combine mateship and a desire to create music. Iggy’s band:

‘...was working towards something with people I was really good mates with. We were like a family, you know just some shitty High School band but it was so much more than that.’

Andrew recalled deep friendships formed from of the Melbourne Heavy Metal community:

‘If you had a ‘metal’ shirt on it was like ‘we’re already friends’. My best friends came out of that community, like one big family. (It) must be like that with other types of music.’

Similarly, religious communities inspired friendships formed through interests in spirituality and music. Cora passionately recalled the various church networks she was a part of and new Christian musicians she continually met from all the other Churches. She spoke of communities within communities and remarked that through Christian music she had friends everywhere throughout Australia. Friendships in spiritual communities were based on music with ‘positive messages’ that facilitated ‘praise and worship’.

Finn began to move away from his community church because he was trying to pursue music with secular rather than religious messages. Finn felt this transition was made easier because he was able to make new friends with similar musical ideas and goals as he was developing.

3.4.6. Interest in music

Some students admitted they may not have established an interest in music if not for their involvement in music communities. Finn recalled how several people in his church community had encouraged his early forays into music and had actually bought him guitar pedals. He was shown how to use them and developed an interest in rock guitar because there were always gigs and events to participate in through the various church networks. Cora described how some of the younger people in her Church had encouraged her as she strove to bring music improvisation to the worship. Elle said she had found her school music boring but that music at her family church services sounded much more passionate and exciting. This helped her to pursue music to the extent that she was soon singing in the Church.

Effective school music programs helped some participants develop an interest in music. Emma recalled how, as she entered senior years at High School, she had begun to experience everything ‘emotionally and creatively’ and that music classes became the perfect way to express herself. Emma reflected that these opportunities led her to the decision to become a musician. Gordon became interested in music because he was able to use school music rooms that were

available to students at lunchtimes. He had not previously taken part in the school music program. He enjoyed 'mucking about on the bass' while his best friend played drums. The 'mucking about' lead Gordon to eventually joining the school Jazz band. Kyrie simply concluded 'If I had not gone to that school I would not have done music.'

Many important benefits were derived from involvement with music communities. Friendships were formed, belonging and identity explored and spaces and places discovered where participants were able to feel supported and accepted. For many, these communities provided the circumstances for the start of exciting and rewarding music journeys.

3.5. Learning in music communities

'The songs that I heard

The occasional book

Were the only fun I ever took.

And I got on with making myself.

The trick is just making yourself'

['Know Your Onion', The Shins](#)

Participants reflected upon learning that took place in music communities. Students gained various music skills and knowledge as well as insights into the 'musical self.'

3.5.1. Music

Experiences in music communities helped students to develop musically. Members of church groups discussed exposure to new styles and musical approaches from more senior church members and music mentors. Cora thought she had been closed to particular music genres but that being part of the church band helped her to appreciate new artists and styles. Isabelle was compelled to try different music instruments that were lacking in church bands. Isabelle was introduced to specific music skills like improvisation, reading music notation and recognising different rhythms and grooves.

Iggy felt he was able to experiment with like-minded musicians in bands 'finding what it's (music) all about' without recourse to specific music theory instruction. Farrah sang with country bands that gigged regularly and commented that this experience helped him to become a better musician and 'front man' that 'really worked the crowd.'

Belinda thrived in her small but tight knit school music community and fondly recalled:

'...learning what it was like to be in a community, like immersion into a whole new culture, learning about music, different ways of doing things and really listening in depth.'

Caitlin also learned about cultural aspects of music making, particularly about the skills and tools for ensuring band members were able to work effectively together. At Emma's school music experience taught her to pursue music knowledge in a self-directed way and value the benefits of independent practice in music.

Cora and Isabelle believed their music technique improved through involvement with their church music community. Cora began to hear and create harmonies in the church vocal ensembles. She became able to anticipate beats and generally grew to understand different aspects of playing in a band. Dylan attended a number of Hill Song events and became familiar with creating music charts for all the new music he was hearing.

Some participants pointed to specific music skills attained via school music communities. Kyrie learned to sight read music in the school concert band and George reflected that the music curriculum involved developing aural skills so that he:

'...learned to understand music, theory, playing in bands and having to make instrumental parts fit nicely together.'

Iggy also felt he had learned a great deal through studying music at school:

'At school I learned about theory and transcription. I learned about performance, working with others and dealing with people who did not show up. I think I started to learn how to express music.'

Effie articulated several key music skills she gained from her years in the community orchestra. She spoke about absorbing the crucial aspects of professionalism – being on time and prepared, of listening and paying attention. Effie also discussed learning effective rehearsal technique and about building team skills. Playing in large ensembles taught her to follow the conductor and section leaders, to lead a section, play in time and listen to others. The orchestra offered technical tutorials where members learned fingering techniques, blowing, posture and rhythmic aspects. Effie concluded that she learned a great deal more through her involvement in the orchestra than through her school music program.

Prior to immigrating, Graham had come across a vast array of new songs in different local styles. Graham learned to play similar songs with different rhythms and tempos depending on where his bands travelled. Bridie was first exposed to Jazz music in the community music programs and learned the concepts of improvisation and syncopation. Fabian recalled listening to a lot of different music in the bands he played, becoming familiar with blues music particularly. He thought he got an ‘all-round’ introduction to music genres and an understanding of ‘how different music might all fit together’.

Participants highlighted the fun and enjoyment they received through learning new things in music communities. They revelled in the freedom to learn at their own pace and direction as different areas of music became interesting or relevant.

3.5.2. Music Industry Skills

Those who played gigs in bands learned how to set and operate sound and technical equipment required for live performance. Others spoke about how playing in ensembles taught them how to approach practice and rehearsal. Harry talked about promoting, organising and the financial aspects of gigs and felt he’d learned a great deal about the ‘music business’ through this process. Iggy and Gordon concluded that many years playing gigs had taught them how the music industry operated and how much (or little) money could be made. Bridie reflected that professionalism was essential in the music industry.

3.5.3. The musical self

Iggy felt that being part of an original music act had helped him to explore who he was and present his identity in a musical way, reflecting:

‘I learned to write lyrics about my feelings, to express things without being soppy or generic.’

Similarly, Cora discussed her development as a singer/songwriter in the church music community where she was encouraged to grow and overcome music challenges. Cora believed that becoming a songwriter was about:

‘...growing to understand who you are as a person and learning to express that musically. In Church, music was my outlet to explore and be creative. You didn’t know what was going to happen. Music was alive to me.’

Gordon told a story about playing in a band beset with poor attitudes. He had learned that he was:

‘...not able to settle for second best, you know, or generic music. The band didn’t show off my skills, just playing that style (pop punk) because it was popular. I now know that being unique is better than generic.’

Hung learned about possible music pathways through participating in a local community music program:

‘I talked to the program conveners, to learn from their experiences so I could get ideas for my own path. I thought maybe I could get a Bachelor of Music and a teaching qualification and maybe even teach at university. One of the conveners told me it would be a waste if I didn’t go on to further study and he talked to me about other courses.’

Participants highlighted many benefits and learning opportunities within music communities, but also identified some negatives.

3.6. Challenges and disappointments in music communities

'You're all out of tune '

['Out of tune', Real Estate](#)

Participants reflected that music communities were sometimes limiting and induced stress and anxiety in some circumstances. Some struggled with fellow community members, became frustrated with group attitudes and grew dissatisfied at unmet expectations. For some, these challenges led them to leave and seek other music environments.

3.6.1. Musical and cultural attitudes

Music scenes or groups demanding narrow music tastes had the capacity to drive people away. Some left bands because band mates were unwilling to explore wider music styles and influences. Farrah spoke extensively about operating his own business as a singer for hire with backing tracks. He made good money and enjoyed working at weddings and parties. But from time to time people in the country music community would criticise that fact that he did not have a 'real band behind him'. Farrah thought they were the sort of people for whom 'nothing's good enough'. Finn moved from his church music community to other band scenes to pursue musical purposes, rather than worship, directions. Emma had initially been into the music culture in Northern NSW but found herself, and other females, excluded from a scene that really favoured hard-core music played by young men. Emma reflected that most young people in the area were so constrained by this genre of music that there was virtually no room for exploration of any other style of music at all. Emma left this community after High School and moved to Melbourne so she could experience a range of musical styles and environments.

Other students had felt constrained by cultural aspects of certain music communities. Cora was challenged by the conservative nature of the Church she was involved in. She complained:

'There was lots of gossip. I had to fight a lot of traditional ideas because we were moving to a more open, free expression of worship. A lot of

adults said that was wrong and tried to stare me down. But I had conviction I was doing the right thing.'

Other respondents were also challenged by church music communities as their musical interests expanded. Some were met with unwillingness for church members to do anything at all different from that which was expected or directed.

As he grew older Finn was challenged by:

'...unquestioning blindness, which just doesn't happen in Church but in any organisation or community.'

For Finn, church culture could be very close minded when it came to questions of sexual orientation and relationships. He recalled an incident where a church leader had made several strident comments about homosexuality that upset Finn, some of whose friends and fellow band members were gay. In another incident Finn recalled that church members who were thought to have become 'overly friendly' had been ostracised from the music community.

3.6.2. Lifestyle issues in music communities

There was animated discussion about so called negative lifestyle issues associated with some music communities. Some students commented that they drifted from their church groups because they had discovered social scenes involving live pub music, drinking and socialising with non-church people. These activities would not have been acceptable within many church communities.

Some participants were challenged by the more overt religious aspects of the Churches they belonged to, particularly those inconsistent with particular music interests. Finn said he had enjoyed music at his family Church but struggled to connect with the religious messages within the music. For Helena, singing and playing in the music ministry became 'a responsibility rather than a joy' because other members seemed only to recognise the religious aspects rather than relishing the music. Helena spoke about wanting to inspire people within the church community by singing and playing. She longed for recognition from the community and God as a musician but was disappointed that it didn't eventuate.

Other participants were challenged by lifestyle choices of friends in their music communities. Djava recalled that the friends who were into the same music as her at High School were 'trouble makers and at times could be really bad people.' A few of these friends were expelled for taking drugs. Djava enjoyed their company when they were playing music but was so concerned about her friends' behaviour that she left the school in Year 10 to get away from the culture. Andrew played in several bands growing up and enjoyed making music with friends but felt confronted by the growing use of drugs and alcohol as part of the music making process. He recalled 'I couldn't deal with drugs so I didn't do it'. A member of one band became so focused on drugs that the rest of the band asked him to leave.

3.6.3. Self-confidence, stress and anxiety

Participants spoke openly about challenges associated with the psychological aspects of music. Isabelle and Caitlin commented on the stress of live or public performance. Caitlin felt anxious performing in front of people and would feel nauseous as each performance approached. Isabelle saw herself as a very 'nervous and shy' person and found it difficult to concentrate on the music during performances because she was so concerned about what everyone was thinking about her.

The relationship between music and confidence was a recurring theme in conversations. Djava spent long hours playing guitar in her bedroom but had never had the courage to play with others. When she finally started playing with a friend's band she struggled to fight the feeling that the other players were better than her. She recalled feeling so intimidated and lacking in confidence that she went home after the first day of rehearsal and cried. Farrah found it difficult playing in bands, because he thought he wasn't that good even when people said they enjoyed his music. Helena said she was challenged:

'By feeling I never measured up and striving to reach music standards, delivering music and worship to God the community and myself. I had a lot of rules that I imposed upon myself and the whole thing affected my confidence that I was ever any good.'

Ben initially felt like an outsider in a group of musicians a close friend had introduced him to. He was self-conscious of his Heavy Metal background and felt like 'an amateur amongst professionals'. Jordan said he always felt like an outsider from the music community at school. He told me he had wished he had engaged more and got more out of the program but he lacked confidence in his musical abilities.

3.6.4. Limited learning opportunities in school communities

There was substantial discussion about challenges faced within school music communities. Elle was scathing of the 'music program' at her High School junior campus. She remembered no actual structured classes and a lot of 'mucking about'. She felt she had learned very little during the junior years. Elle was then incensed when she was refused entry into VCE music because she had not advanced enough. Alana and Hung had wanted to complete VCE music but her school decided not to offer it. Isabelle lamented that her school offered music:

'...only in Year 8 and the classrooms were really basic, and after that, nothing, no music at all!'

Others commented on how poor their school music programs were, resulting in learning less than they thought they should have. Belinda was forthright in observing that the music program at her College was:

'A disaster - poorly organised, no motivation, they offered no music that people were interested in, and it was a real drag. There were some very troubled students and overall I think I learned very little.'

Belinda took singing lessons at school but was critical of the fact that she had to do so during other class time and consequently missed out on material from other important subjects. This caused her so much stress that she felt she had to discontinue music. Effie was learning violin privately, steadily progressing through AMEB levels and looking forward to being challenged and learning more at High School, but reflected angrily that:

'The music program was really crap. It didn't cater for those with experience. I was reluctantly involved in the school orchestra where everyone was a beginner. It sounded crap and was not enjoyable.'

Some students completed VCE music at High School but felt they did not reach the level they should have. Caitlin completed VCE music in Year 12 but felt that the whole program had been poorly run. Her school had not offered Year 11 music so she struggled with theory especially because she had not had the time to consolidate the fundamental aspects. Andrew described music classes that were poorly taught and only randomly scheduled.

Some participants complained that the school did not make music a priority. Alana believed there should have been more music happening at school but it observed that the music program was 'pushed to the side' compared to other areas like sport. Delaney was passionate about music and believed she had a natural ability but felt let down by the music program at school:

'There was not much of a music program. What they were teaching in Year 12 music was what others were learning in Year 7 at better schools. In year 12 there were only twelve students doing VET music and there was no VCE music offered, otherwise I would have done it. Most of the staff at the school didn't really care much about music.'

Learning was believed to have been adversely affected by a lack of funding for music and inadequate music facilities. Finn thought that the whole music program at his school had been a:

'...a mess that really didn't work. I was interested in music technology but all they had was a 'Pentium 3' with a 'Motorola' sound card and out-dated 'Cuebase'. I owned better equipment than at school!'

Alana appeared somewhat resigned in observing:

'The music department always got funds cut – and still is (getting cut). That seems to be the story of most schools. My school only offered music until Year 8 and even then there was no theory. They did not offer VCE music, only VET music technology. We got the basics and that's it...'

Belinda recalled that the music department at her High School was very small with only the most basic facilities consisting of one music room, one piano and no other instruments. She had gone back to her own school recently and found that the program had been further diminished and no longer even offered a

piano teacher. Belinda was now training to be a school music teacher and observed that:

‘All the arts got cut, that’s just the way it is. I’ve seen this in schools I’m doing rounds in. They keep the trades because we are in the west where they think people just do trades and don’t go to university – and this is just stereotyping the west.’

Some blamed poor teaching for a lack of learning at High School. Gordon complained that some teachers were very ‘laid back’ in their approach and did not push those, including Gordon, who probably needed some coaxing. Delaney was critical of her music teacher in Year 11 who was not even able to provide a written syllabus for the class. Effie was frustrated by a lack of guidelines and criteria in the music units she undertook. Harry thought that the whole music program at his High School seemed unstructured. He blamed poor organisation on the teachers ‘slack’ attitudes in allowing students to muck about in class and play computer games. He felt students who were interested in learning were marginalised. Alana complained that her Year 11 music teacher would put effort into those who were advanced in music but not others.

Others remarked that some music teachers did not seem to ‘know their stuff’ and that teachers lacked appropriate qualifications. Ben thought the music teachers at his school did not really play music at all. Delaney thought her music teachers in Year 7 and 8 were very limited in their knowledge of music. She recalled that a music teacher arrived in Year 9 who was very competent. Delaney appreciated the teacher enormously but the teacher left in Year 10 and the school did not replace the position. Djava felt she got very little from the school’s guitar teacher, because he spent the entire lesson ‘showing off’ his skills and very little time actually instructing her how to play. Isabelle summed up participant dissatisfaction with music teaching by angrily remarking:

‘At High School I didn’t really learn much – it was really a case of how NOT to do music education’.

3.6.5. Challenged by others' musical skills or attitudes

Participants struggled with other musicians in the community who were not as dedicated or skilful as they were. Alternatively, some participants worried that their music skill level was inferior to other musicians in that community.

Members of church music communities struggled with other members' lack of musicianship at times. Alex complained that:

'...bad musicians played in some of the church bands; they never wanted to go further. It was challenging because they didn't even know about rhythm or chords'

Finn came to realise that:

'I didn't actually like the music the church community sang. It was atrocious – and then they used God's name to excuse it being sloppy, just throwing the 'G word' around to get people to do what they wanted them to.'

Other participants struggled with the standard of musicianship in their school music communities. Effie and Delaney were both reasonably advanced musicians by the time they reached High School and spoke about the challenges of learning with others who were not as skilled. Effie participated in group lessons but felt she missed out on advancing in any way as everyone else in the group was behind her. Delaney spoke about her experiences with boys in the High School music group who took centre stage with their rock bands but who 'were untrained and basically loud and awful.' She believed these students held others back because of their poor skills and because they did not realise how talented Delaney and some of her friends were. Some participants involved in music with church communities were attempting to relate spiritual messages through music, but at times became frustrated by other members. Alex observed that:

'It can be challenging to get everyone in the right mindset or the way God's telling me to do it, so I get better and being more organised. New rules are made and then not being followed a week later. I find it frustrating. Things are suggested but three months later nothing is

happening. Some people are doing it but not praying to God about it, just doing it on the spot.'

Dylan realised early on that he had a good ear for music and learned quickly within the music ministry at his Church. However he was challenged by what he perceived as other members' lack of drive and ambition declaring that:

'I dreamed of more than others in church music and wanted to experience more and didn't want to just accept the limited non engaged life that they seemed to...'

Members of school music communities could also appear unmotivated and this challenged participants who wanted to wring as much from music classes as possible. Caitlin became increasingly frustrated by one VCE ensemble member's ongoing failure to attend rehearsals. Caitlin didn't know why the student did not attend regularly but worried about the effect their non-participation would have on the overall quality of the performance. She found the whole thing 'very stressful'. George felt that some students chose to do music 'as a bludge' and were not really serious or passionate about music at all. Delaney appeared to have a similar experience observing that:

'School was tough at times. Most didn't take a passionate interest in music; they might listen to it but that was all. I was passionate. In my class only three or four were really interested and the rest were like 'whatever'. The teachers would try to get them involved but they were resistant.'

Delaney ended up deciding she would discontinue music in Year 12 due to the effect this endemic apathy had on her enjoyment of music. Effie recalled that most of the other students in her music classes did not have music backgrounds and had been forced to be there because they could not be allocated to their preferred electives. As a result these students were disruptive and Effie found it an enormous challenge to learn anything, let alone enjoy the experience.

Elle remembered school as a lonely and, at times, frightening place. By her own admission she was shy and being small in stature, and interested in music, made her a target for bullies. She was lampooned for liking the Year 7 music

classes where others played up and railed against the class music teacher. Isabelle experienced similar criticism at her High School where anyone who identified themselves as part of the music group was 'picked on and teased.'

3.6.6. Music challenges

Effie found Year 12 Music Performance Units 3 and 4 particularly challenging. She thought the VCE music pieces were especially tough because they were chosen from the Classical repertoire. Effie found these pieces required significantly more skill than contemporary repertoire chosen by other students. Effie still remembered the Handel sonata had 'some really difficult passages, really tricky phrasing, time and articulation'. Andrew had a similar experience playing guitar in Music Performance Units 3 and 4 where he was forced to tackle Bach studies. He admitted he saw relevance in having to learn these pieces but reflected that he never understood them or connected with them musically.

Both Andrew and Dylan commented on challenges faced studying theoretical aspects of music. Andrew claimed that he hated rhythmic dictation and had 'no idea what was going on' whilst Dylan resisted learning to read and write music notation because he had always found it easier to rely on his ear and had already learned to read tablature.

3.6.7. Leaving music communities

Some participants reached the point where they felt they had to leave the music communities they had belonged to. Emma had been an active and passionate member of her tight knit school community for almost twelve years. She enjoyed so many aspects of that community but in the end felt she:

'...had to escape because it (the music community) was a like a bubble and I had to see what was outside of that.'

Graham's cultural community in Melbourne had welcomed him when he arrived in Australia. They had provided a thriving music environment and he appreciated the support. However he chose to leave the community because he felt he had to experience other music languages and cultures. Finn and Andrew

spoke of leaving church music communities because they had outgrown the music and philosophies being espoused.

Despite the challenges within music communities, participants in the investigation all chose to undertake some form of music study at tertiary level.

3.7. Pathways to Victoria University

'On the fast lane of the street I'm driving

Sometimes, somewhere, I'm arriving

Every day and every night'

['The Race', Yello](#)

The desire to further explore and engage with music brought the participants to study music at Victoria University. Participants discussed different reasons for choosing particular paths to tertiary music study. The need to build music skills and knowledge, changing career options, community support and the perceived benefits of Victoria University played significant roles in how participants came to the formal study of music.

3.7.1. Learning more about music

Many participants wanted to learn more about music generally. They discussed the need to improve general practical music skills and understood that their general music knowledge was relatively low and so pursued particular tertiary institutions accordingly. Although Jordan was attracted to programs at other 'first choice' universities he reasoned he was not at the required standard for those programs. He applied for TAFE programs at a variety of public tertiary institutions because he knew they had well regarded foundation music performance programs.

Some participants were aware of pathway options available in tertiary music. Iggy and Andrew knew that successful completion of a TAFE Diploma of Music articulated into the undergraduate music degree at Victoria University. Several students commented that they were 'not ready' for undergraduate music study. Students felt that undertaking a TAFE course was an appropriate bridge between High School and community music and the rigours of university.

Others were less sure of the differences between TAFE and Higher Education sectors. Isabelle confessed that when she had started the Certificate IV TAFE course she did not know about the degree pathway option. She knew she wanted to do a music course and had been successful in being selected for that course. Likewise Jordan admitted:

‘I was enrolling in a music course and not sure what type of qualification it was, I just wanted to do some kind of music course.’

Many students chose tertiary music options because they were passionate about music and couldn’t imagine studying anything else. Emma reflected that engaging with music at High School had been really her only passion so further study in music seemed ‘obvious’. Helena decided she would study music because there wasn’t anything else she was as nearly passionate about. Cora conceded that her family and community had urged her to pursue financial security and career stability. However, she was so passionate about music that she decided to try further study and forge a career in music.

Other completed music study at other institutions and wanted to try further music study. Some students had completed Certificate II and III courses prior to continuing with TAFE at Victoria University. Many participants had engaged with private instrumental study, some of whom had completed AMEB exams, and now felt they were ready for tertiary music education. Ben began studying composition by correspondence at a regional university but decided he needed a more practical and ‘hands on’ course. Dylan completed a community short course in music and saw the Certificate IV course at Victoria University as an attractive ‘next step’.

3.7.2. Positive impressions of Victoria University

A number of participants highlighted that a positive initial engagement had convinced them to choose to study music at Victoria University. Emma shared a story that illustrated the importance of a good first impression:

‘I had applied for a number of courses and I was freaked out about what was required of the audition so I called Y (a music administrative assistant in the music area). She told me not to be nervous, that she’d

done the course and said if I demonstrated passion and commitment I'd have a good chance of getting in. Just from that conversation I wanted to be at Victoria University.'

Isabelle also received a favourable first impression, recounting:

'I had auditioned with X and Y Universities first and they were really rushed and wanted me to get on with it. I got to Victoria University late for my audition as the train had broken down and I called up say I was running late. A teacher actually came and got me from the station and I thought that was so nice, not knowing Melbourne at all. Then at the audition, another teacher offered me water and a chance to calm down. I got offers from other universities but I chose Victoria University.'

Finn moved down to Melbourne with the intention of studying music. He researched courses online and attended a number of auditions. The undergraduate course at Victoria University appeared to offer what he was looking for, but other courses were closer to the inner city where he had first moved. He also asked to inspect facilities at X and Y universities but had been told there was no time. Finn had called H (one of the Victoria University music staff) to talk about the course and H offered to pick him up from the station for the audition because he knew Finn was unfamiliar with the area and showed him around the music department. Finn remembered:

'I auditioned and we completed the interview. We then had a coffee and looked around and we just talked about music. From that, Victoria University was the only place I wanted to study.'

The nature of the audition process appeared to play an important role in choice of institution. Andrew was deciding between a number of different music courses. He exclaimed:

'I chose Victoria University because one of the teachers on the panel answered all my questions about the practical aspects of the course at the audition. He was so helpful and patient with me!'

Kyrie concluded that the audition process at Victoria University compared favourably to auditions he did at other institutions:

‘The panellists at X University were mean spirited and pretentious but at Victoria University they were really relaxed and encouraging – so I chose Victoria University purely because of that.’

Open Days and Information sessions factored in study choices. Information sessions at Victoria University involved tours, talks by teaching staff and current students speaking about their experiences in the course and performing live music. Dylan remembered attending the information session. He recalled that:

‘Victoria University felt like a really good place, a lot better than where I had been and I could also live in student digs. I saw the new music building and thought ‘I have to study here’. Straight away the facilities grabbed you. I still remember the band that played on stage that day – I spoke to them all. After that Victoria University was my only preference.’

Effie recounted a similar experience. She had visited Open Day at X University but left with the impression that she was not really welcome there as a violinist in a contemporary music course. Effie attended the Victoria University Information session. She enjoyed the students performing and claimed that:

‘...no other university had given that much information and in depth and I loved the sound of the course and the atmosphere’.

Ben said he had his heart set on Victoria University music after attending the Open and Information days. He was impressed that the teachers were so welcoming and able to provide clear and in depth information so that he knew what to expect.

3.7.3. Recommendations for Victoria University

Music courses at Victoria Universities were recommended to students by people whose judgement they trusted. Both Gordon and Hung chose to apply for the Certificate IV in Music because friends had completed the course and thought the course would be enjoyable and suitable. Harry’s friend was studying the Certificate IV in Music and Harry became interested in the course through his friend’s stories of study. Harry joked:

‘He (Harry’s friend) thought the course was great and had a ‘fat head’ from being a university student. I thought I could be like that too!’

Ben knew two music teachers who had completed the Bachelor of music at Victoria University. They were able to convince Ben that the course would help him with the music career he was determined to establish. Delaney had a sister who completed the Bachelor of Music and Diploma of Education at Victoria University and was now a music teacher at X High School. Delaney had wanted to take the same study path but the Bachelor of Music course was discontinued as she completed Year 12. Delaney chose to study the Bachelor of Education majoring in music on the recommendation of her sister.

Djava's private guitar teacher advised her to apply for the Certificate IV in Music at Victoria University. Djava was unsure whether she was ready for tertiary music study but she applied and was successful. Iggy commented that his private guitar teacher, who worked as a sessional staff member in music at Victoria University, provided the impetus for him to apply for the Certificate IV in Music.

3.7.4. Spiritual guidance

Several respondents with religious convictions commented that God and prayer had played an important part in their decision to study music at Victoria University. Alex had struggled with depression and recounted a story about coming to study music at Victoria University. The youth leader in the music ministry had wanted him to take up the drums in the church band. Alex had no real music background and was reluctant to get involved. He eventually decided to give music a go, began playing drums and quickly found himself feeling better. Alex remarked that:

'God provided the answer to problems by providing for me to play drums.'

Alex's parents insisted that he should undertake tertiary study but he felt unmotivated. Eventually Alex applied for the Certificate IV in Music at Victoria University reasoning that if God wanted him to do study music he would be offered a place in the course. Alex was successful despite admitting he did a poor audition. Alex concluded that:

'God is amazing because even though I did a bad audition I still got in!'

Isabelle recounted a similar story. She had completed the audition at Victoria University but had heard nothing just weeks before the course was due to begin. She said she felt like a failure because she had not been offered a place. Her mother encouraged her to call the music department and ask why she had not been accepted into the course. In fact there had been an administrative error and her paperwork had been misplaced. One of the teachers recalled her audition and, as there had been a last minute deferral by one of the successful students, was happy to offer Helena a place in the course. Helena believed:

‘...it (being offered a place in the course) was a ‘God thing’ because the impossible happened – it was a sign and I threw myself into it.’

3.7.5. Music and education

Eight participants were studying music as part of education degrees at Victoria University. The majority of these participants had chosen to study music as a major area of study in their Bachelor of Education course.

Participants discussed the decision to enrol into a teaching course because they felt that teaching would be a fulfilling career. Caroline said she went into teaching as a way of watching and helping people to grow. Belinda wanted to be a teacher because she considered it to be a rewarding career. Elle believed that becoming a parent had given her the confidence to begin a teaching course. Following a difficult divorce she thought that this was the time for her to do something for her own career. She declared:

‘I just wanted to be a teacher – it’s what I always wanted to do but never had the chance. Then I chose music as my major because I love music. I never thought before about what type of teacher I would be before that. Mum was a teacher and I had taught children music at Church and enjoyed it. I liked the reward of having them come back and saying they’d loved it. I thought I’d make a good teacher.’

Fabien had been working as an education aid at a school for the disabled. He had also studied trades at school, but admitted that it had not provided much mental stimulation. Fabien decided he wanted to push himself and so chose to study education at Victoria University, majoring in music and maths.

George completed the TAFE Diploma of music at Victoria University. He had wanted to enrol in the music degree but by then it had been discontinued. He found out that he could study music in the Bachelor of Education. His mother was a teacher and thought he would also make a good teacher. He decided to 'give education a go' with the aim of becoming a High School music teacher. Belinda had always wanted to be a primary school teacher but did not achieve the ENTER score required for the education degree at VU. She chose to study a TAFE visual arts course in order to gain high marks to apply to transfer into the education degree. She did well and was accepted into education the following year. Belinda chose music as one of her majors because she felt that music would be a useful classroom tool in primary teaching. Alana said she chose education at VU because of the reputation and the value she placed on the additional time spent in practicum offered in relation to other courses. Alana chose music as a major because she had enjoyed her music experiences at school and in her community music group.

3.7.6. Career change

Some chose to study music because they felt their work or career was not rewarding. Ben was passionate about music and had been playing in bands since his early teens. By his mid-twenties he was married with two children and had spent several years working long hours at a packing and freight company. By his own admission he earned a decent wage but felt unfulfilled. Ben decided to enrol in music at Victoria University. He said:

'I wanted to have a career my kids were proud of and to show them that being a 'muso' could lead to something.'

Elle was working at a major supermarket chain full time when she decided to undertake tertiary study. She exclaimed:

'I hated working there. It just wasn't for me and I thought 'I don't want to do this for the rest of my life.'

Alana worked as flight attendant for a year. She observed:

‘Doing that made me realise where I wanted to go. I didn’t want to be serving tea and coffee for the rest of my life, as glamorous as that might have seemed. I loved music and I realised I needed more in my life.’

Delaney decided to undertake an education degree and major in music after she had initially been accepted into a forensic science course after completing Year 12. However she found that the course was not what she had expected and that she was not engaged with the subject material. She said she had only felt ‘alive’ when playing music and reasoned that an education degree might enable her to have a career and pursue her love of music.

A few participants commented that they had been uncertain about what they should study at university and ‘ended up in music’. Djava had always wanted to study at university but never seriously thought about applying due to acute low self-esteem. It was not until her private guitar teacher suggested that she study music that she finally decided to apply for Certificate IV in Music at Victoria University. Iggy thought he should go to university after finishing High School because he felt reluctant to go straight into the workforce. Iggy had not really considered music courses but, as he had really enjoyed playing in several bands, he decided to undertake music studies.

3.8. Coda: Concluding comments

A myriad of passionate and intriguing music experiences were presented. Stories included first music experiences of developing an interest in music. Participants described involvement in a variety of vibrant music communities despite some challenges and limitations. Music communities provided supportive places and spaces for students to play and grow as musicians. Students highlighted the sheer enjoyment they received from playing and creating music with friends. Participants decided to pursue music at the tertiary level and described the journeys to study music at Victoria University. The following chapter describes data detailing participant experiences of studying music at Victoria University.

Chapter 4. **Studying music at Victoria University**

4.1. Prelude

This chapter presents data collected from focus groups and interviews from the three cohorts of Victoria University music students in this study. As with Chapter 3, the data is presented collectively in order to reflect a range of common experiences across the cohorts.

Victoria University music students reported a range of contrasting experiences in music study. Students raised positive aspects but also noted a range of challenges in negotiating and engaging in formal tertiary music study. Notions of community in the context of institutional music study were discussed. Conversations addressed the relevance of music study to music activity and career. The chapter concludes with participant suggestions for improving the music study experience. Powerful comments on the opportunity to voicing story and self are also presented.

4.2. Positives of studying music at Victoria University

'Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin'

[Good Vibrations, The Beach Boys](#)

Students were able to articulate many positive and enjoyable aspects of studying music at VU. They found many subjects valuable and appreciated gaining some worthwhile music skills and knowledge. Inspiring teachers and innovative teaching styles provided effective learning experiences. Participants told stories of friendship and support from friends and teachers and discussed the relationship between music study and independent music activities. Finally, participants talked about the aspects of university facilities, locations and resources that supported effective learning.

4.2.1. Units of study

Some specific music units of study were identified as being particularly beneficial and enjoyable. Units of study involving the performance of music were seen by many of the participants as useful and fun. All three cohorts

undertook these kinds of units, although the number and level of the unit differed between the TAFE and HE courses.

All students participated in practical music ensembles as part of various music units. Students were allocated to an ensemble group of between five to seven students where they chose, prepared and performed music repertoire. Ensemble groups were directed by a tutor who assisted with ensemble activities and learning. Many participants spoke positively of their experiences in these ensemble groups. Belinda, who was studying music as part of an education degree, exclaimed:

‘...ensemble was fun!’ We were able to put all the theory we were learning into practice.’

Belinda loved being part of a group who worked together to produce a collective outcome. Caroline agreed and commented that she enjoyed learning different styles of music in her ensemble because students came to the group with different music backgrounds and preferences. Isabelle believed ensemble classes allowed her to forge close relationships due to the intense and personal process of preparing music to perform together.

The TAFE and undergraduate music courses included ‘performance platform’ units where students were required to perform material in front of teachers and other students on a weekly basis. This unit was designed to encourage students to prepare new repertoire and build public performance technique and offered a safe and supportive opportunity for constructive feedback. Many students found the unit valuable. Kyrie judged that the unit was the highlight of the course because he was able to hear other students play and gauge relative standards and musical progress. Kyrie said he enjoyed the significant opportunities that this unit of study offered him to perform with other students on stage in a public environment. Iggy felt that the unit was beneficial because it forced him to choose and prepare new songs. He concluded that he was able to expand the range and depth of his musical repertoire over the duration of the course. Jordan appreciated the diverse repertoire he heard and was able to engage with. He declared:

‘If I had walked in that first day and had been told not to play this or that I would have walked away straight away. This is what I like about the course compared to other places.’

Students were required to perform in recitals as an assessment component for practical music units. Students were required to prepare and present music repertoire in a performance environment to a panel of teachers who assessed the performances according to a range of music criteria. Some participants commented that they enjoyed recitals. Helena remarked that she liked recitals because:

‘...there was a goal and I enjoyed singing in front of friends and family and presenting something I had worked on for a whole term.’

Harry declared that recitals were effective preparation for public performances because:

‘It forced me to really prepare well and meet the expectations that others had of me – just like the public would.’

Respondents identified individual instrumental tuition as an enjoyable and important part of their study. Fabien remarked:

‘I was able to learn so much more about the instrument and what I could really do with it. I could ask questions and get the answers I needed because I was the only student. You don’t get that opportunity at university very often.’

Andrew enjoyed instrumental study because the subject allowed him to more clearly establish the link between music theory and his guitar playing. Jordan felt instrumental study helped him analyse music better and articulate music theory in the context of his instrument. Dylan was certain that instrumental study improved his technique and style of playing and gave him confidence to tackle more challenging repertoire.

Students discussed music history and culture units. Iggy determined these units exposed him to new concepts in music that he had been unaware of. Kyrie commented that:

‘...understanding music’s place and role in society is really useful as a performer, composer and teacher.’

Cora, who had had limited exposure to academic literature in music, enjoyed the opportunity to read and analyse writing about music. She felt that these units helped her to contemplate a range of careers in music. Dylan appreciated the opportunity to improve writing skills and thinking skills.

Composition and song writing units elicited some very positive comments. Finn enjoyed learning about composition techniques and having the space to experiment with new ways of making music. Jordan learned about different composers that provided new ideas about writing his own music. Dylan commented that he enjoyed a film composition class because he was able to use visual images to inspire new and interesting sounds.

Some students appeared to appreciate the benefits of studying music theory. Theory classes helped make Isabelle make sense of ‘the language of music’ and to better understand ‘how and why I was playing what I was playing.’ George commented that theory classes allowed him to correct false assumptions he had made while learning to play guitar. Elle had to exert a great deal of effort to pass music theory but she found she enjoyed the challenge of getting out of her ‘comfort zone’ and learning useful approaches to understanding music.

Music technology units were identified as relevant and enjoyable. Jordan spoke about recording projects undertaken as part of his music studies:

‘Those projects were invaluable. I got so much ‘hands on’ experience of recording tools and processes and then got to have these real music products that I’d made.’

Harry said he liked subjects involving technology because these subjects offered the opportunity to combine his experience and knowledge of computers and software with his passion for making music. Isabelle found learning music notation software invaluable for other music subjects as well as her own independent musical pursuits.

Music industry and music business units were identified as being valuable because they offered insights into the ‘real music world’. Many participants

commented on independent study units that afforded them the freedom to explore their own musical ideas with the support and guidance of the academic environment.

4.2.2. Specific music skills attained

Participants reported gaining specific music skills from courses and, unsurprisingly, found this to be a positive aspect of their studies. Performance and technical skills were described positively. Participants identified the value of learning specific technical aspects such as instrument technique, dynamics and tone. These skills tended to be specifically taught, learned and practised in units like instrumental study lessons, ensemble group classes and performance platform classes. Andrew remembered:

‘...falling in love with extended chords, their sound and the way you could use them - new chords that I would never have come across just playing in a ‘metal’ band.’

Others highlighted specific ensemble skills like devising and arranging appropriate instrumental parts, constructing effective group dynamics and exploring different ways of expressing and presenting music as a group. Delaney felt working effectively in ensembles was amongst the most valuable aspect of music studies. Graham felt competent as a solo musician but had struggled to work effectively with other musicians. However he was delighted that:

‘It all came together, all the things we needed to know about making the music we played together actually sound good – playing together, working together.’

There was consensus about the importance of groups having tutors to assist with music and ensemble skills. Tutors helped with arrangement and effective decision making and provided guidance and mentoring.

Students commented on improved improvisational skills gleaned through various performance based units. Andrew was challenged to incorporate new improvisational ideas and approaches to repertoire he felt he ‘already knew

pretty well'. Dylan loved arranging different instrumental parts depending of the style and period of the music he was preparing.

Some participants were also able to identify the importance of music theory knowledge. Students were able to consolidate basic theoretical skills such as keys, modes, note values and rhythm and time. George likened confidence with music theory to linguistic confidence where:

'... you know how to articulate (musically) what you want things to sound like.'

Others highlighted improved reading and sight reading skills which helped with all areas of music. Participants also acknowledged the importance of music theory skills in the development of composition and arranging. Many students, like Graham, were inclined to play music by ear but came to understand that understanding music theory and being able to read notation could lead to playing more interesting and challenging music.

Some participants identified the importance of developing effective music communication. Hung acknowledged the benefit of being able to 'say what you mean and have it understood'. Groups operating with clear communication were more able to organise, prepare and present coherent music performances. Elle pointed out that music criticism needed to use effective and unambiguous language in order to assist rather than offend.

Participants discussed specific technological skills gained as part of their music studies. Iggy appreciated learning how to properly set up and operate live performance equipment while Cora commented on the usefulness of becoming familiar with music hardware and software functions in the studio environment. Skills and knowledge acquired in music technology classes enabled Finn to build a guitar amplifier in an Independent Study project.

Participants identified specific academic skills attained through their music education. Students highlighted reading and analysing texts, finding and using evidentiary resources effectively, writing with confidence and clarity and presenting written information in appropriate styles as key aspects of their learning. Andrew remarked:

‘Now I know how to read, write and speak confidently about music. I look into things more closely and I don’t take everything for granted. I didn’t think I would learn these things in a music course, but I did. Maybe at the time I didn’t really see the relevance or importance but I do now, especially when I use them in my life and work.’

4.2.3. Teachers

Students identified the importance of teachers in their music education. Isabelle remarked:

‘The teachers were the greatest thing (in the music course) – they were so interested in music and in people.’

Students formed close working relationships with teachers. Effie noted that students and teachers appeared to get along very well together. Others felt that teachers provided support and were approachable. Many students admitted that they struggled with aspects of their music studies but that teachers were able to assist them to deal with challenges and ‘get through’. Bridie commented,

‘You could always talk to teachers; they were always willing to help or chat when I need to talk things over. They were always supportive and you could go to them with questions whenever you needed to.’

There was substantial discussion about the professional and industry expertise of teachers in music courses. Students thought teachers with ‘real life experience’ were able to include music industry knowledge in their teaching. Participants clearly respected teachers with known performance and recording achievements. Kyrie declared:

‘Victoria University teachers are very knowledgeable and are all musicians and it shouldn’t be any other way.’

The passion and drive of music teachers was acknowledged. Effie was inspired by the enthusiasm of her teachers and Dylan recalled:

‘The teachers were dedicated in what they were doing. They wanted us all to succeed and that gave us drive. There was always a lot of positive reinforcement.’

Students commented on specific teachers. HA was identified by many participants as an outstanding teacher. Kyrie concluded that HA had engaged him more than any other music teacher he had ever had:

‘HA encouraged me that I could really be a musician and that made me believe in myself and achieve more.’

Effie acknowledged that HA's enthusiasm had inspired her to enjoy music theory classes:

‘He would play a chord and say ‘isn't that beautiful?’ And he really cared about all of us. HA gave everyone feedback and was very approachable. If he had not run the class like that I would have been absolutely stuffed!’

NJ was praised for innovative approaches to teaching composition and for involving her own creative work in teaching. Jordan decided JG was the best all-around teacher:

‘He really knew all areas of music and not only structured classes well but was able to make what you were learning enjoyable.’

4.2.4. Effective teaching

Several different pedagogical aspects of studying music were identified as effective or enjoyable. Students admitted instrumental studies were a challenging yet crucial area of music studies requiring effective pedagogical approaches. There was some consensus that instrumental teaching needed to accommodate different musical goals and the ways that students learn. Kyrie appreciated that his guitar teacher allowed for his reliance on ear playing; and the practical ‘hands on’ way he thought he learned most effectively. Helena felt that her instrumental teacher's insistence on the use of journaling was important because it taught her to self-reflect to effectively assess her music progress and goals.

Participants highlighted engagement as a crucial part of good teaching. Students felt they were more likely to engage with a subject area when they understood the relevance of what they were studying. Iggy became more interested in music theory because the teacher was able to articulate theoretical concepts in practical music classes. Kyrie remarked:

‘Teachers that can engage a student is what’s needed– sometimes it’s not even about what they are teaching but the way they are teaching it that’s important.’

Cora’s improvisation teacher told the class that it didn’t matter if what they were playing sounded ‘wrong’ because it was important to try different things. She exclaimed:

‘I was like ‘whoa!’ This inspired me to play Jazz and improvise because he provided a safe place to try things where I wasn’t going to be criticised or told off.’

Effective teaching involved careful and clear instruction by teachers. Students were appreciative of information that was ‘unpacked’ properly. Ben described this as ‘scaffolding content and assessment in a well thought-out and sequential way’. Belinda found the incorporation of weekly exercises in theory classes beneficial because it allowed for ongoing and ‘linked’ learning rather than ‘chunks that were too big to swallow’.

The prioritisation of support and care were highlighted in discussions focusing on effective teaching. Students commented that feeling cared for and secure were preconditions for more effective learning. Gordon recognised the amount of work teachers put into individual students and acknowledged that everyone got the attention they needed. Fabien told a story about struggling with several aspects of an aural theory class. His anxiety grew as he feared he would fail the unit. Finally he admitted his worries to the teacher. He remembered:

‘LP helped me to calm down. We talked about what I needed to work on and he suggested some different ways to get on top of things. I really felt like he wanted me to succeed and gave me the advice and inspiration I needed.’

Students identified the importance of clear and constructive feedback in teaching. Many felt that receiving feedback on an ongoing basis, rather than only at the end of semester (via formal assessment items) was more beneficial because it allowed for students to discover and address weaknesses in a timely manner. Performance platform classes were raised as an example. Each week students prepared and performed repertoire to their peers and teachers and

then teachers and other students provided constructive feedback. Students commented that weekly feedback on performances played an important role in ongoing musical development.

Participants recognised that good teaching ensured assessment tasks and criteria were clearly articulated and understood. Andrew recalled numerous class discussions where assessment tasks and criteria were outlined, explained and, at times, even debated. Students valued clear guidelines about meeting assessment criteria. Cora noted the importance of well-prepared unit guides that included easy-to-understand assessment task and criteria. Helena and other acknowledged awareness of how recital performances were assessed and moderated. Participants agreed assessment needed to be perceived as 'fair'. Iggy added:

'I thought the assessment was fair. You knew where you were. The teachers would give you feedback and explain why they had marked you in a certain way. It (assessment) was objective, not based on personal likes and dislikes of the teachers.'

Elle highlighted by group performance marking as an example of fair assessment. The final overall mark included both an individual and collective mark and Elle declared that this captured an accurate reflection of the actual performance standard.

Students pointed to the links between learning culture and environment and effective teaching. Discussion raised topics like course expectations, course aims, subject information, performance culture and standards, time considerations and class size. Jordan explained that he had been frustrated by low expectations in some classes. But that had changed when he reached JK's classes. Jordan noted that JK made it clear to students from the beginning that he expected more from the students. JK prepared thoroughly for classes and provided clear assessment expectations. Jordan believed:

'The atmosphere changed. Things were more professional and the expectations were higher. All of this was explained as part of doing a university course and everything had to be of a higher standard.'

The seemingly obvious fact that students were able to 'do music all the time' was a real positive for the participants. Caroline exclaimed that she loved the practical aspects of music study like writing and presenting her own music. Belinda said that her ensemble group felt like a 'real band' who worked as a team to practise effectively and regularly. Finn felt that performance classes were safe environments to:

'Figure things out, to try weird stuff, and that was empowering knowing that we could break (musical) rules.'

There was discussion about the necessary time required for effective learning. Several participants who had completed or who were currently undertaking TAFE music studies commented that the requirement to attend longer, more regular classes allowed for a greater engagement with the course materials. Participants valued the opportunity extra time created for closer relationships with fellow students and teachers. Ben remembered:

'The same people were there every day, learning together and being challenged together. We had time to break information down which helped. We were not too rushed or pushed.'

Cora noted that students were often on campus five days a week in order to attend scheduled classes, complete assessments and attend student led group and individual rehearsals. Cora said:

'Being required to be there (on campus) that amount of time fostered much closer relationships and gave us the time we needed to learn what we needed to learn.'

Participants acknowledged the sheer amount of time required to learn instruments, build theoretical and technical skills and to apply those skills to performance and academic tasks. There was agreement that a different style of teaching was required for music teaching that provided extended time and space for 'slow learning'.

Caroline commented:

'We had a lot of time in class to work on and finish assignments and the teacher would walk around and help us and put materials on the

computer; and for music you needed that different style of teaching.

Learning music is different to just a lecture and talking'

Many students raised the issue of class size. Most music units involved either small groups or limited class size (of no more than 20 students) for pedagogical and resourcing reasons. There was strong support for this kind of 'small' of 'manageable' class size to achieve more effective learning. Belinda remarked that:

'It was about having a small class, a community that mattered. Having not too many (students) in any music class meant that things could be very hands on.'

Students commented that smaller class size meant students got to know one another better and were able to help one another out more. Fabien concluded that a smaller class meant that:

'Instead of having a lecture with hundreds of people, a class with 15-20 mates is easier to communicate with each other and the lecturers.'

4.2.5. Music courses structure and content

Students appreciated that the TAFE Certificate IV music course scaffolded learning, beginning with the 'basics' of music. Iggy noted that all students were required to complete a Sibelius (music notation software) intensive in the first week of first year, so that all students had a solid foundation for digital music and the tools needed in other subjects. Cora enjoyed the broad range of units that introduced students to different music styles and concepts.

Students valued the broad base of the Bachelor of Music course which they felt presented a holistic a music education that covered technology, performance, theory and song writing. Kyrie compared the VU Bachelor of Music favourably to other university music courses where some of his friends were studying and that did not offer a broad range of styles, subjects and learning. Dylan argued that the Bachelor of Music course was well structured because it addressed music theory, music industry, music appreciation, and performance which he felt were the necessary elements music students need to know about.

Caroline said she had really enjoyed studying music as part of an education course. She exclaimed:

‘I came in with no formal background and to be able to do so much right from the first class has been fantastic.’

Others undertaking a major in music in education degrees made some positive observations. Alana described the music subjects she had completed as rewarding. Delaney concluded that music studies had taught her a range of skills and knowledge that would benefit her as a teacher. She claimed she had been constantly challenged to learn something new. Belinda felt studying music in the education course had helped her to grow as a person and musician.

4.2.6. Friendship and support

There was wide ranging discussion of the importance of friendship in participant experiences of music education. Students shared stories about forming and growing relationships with other students and appreciating the care and support students showed for one another.

Alex valued the friendships he had been able to make studying in the Certificate IV in Music and spoke about:

‘Getting to know people, make connections; grow interests with people from different nationalities and from different backgrounds, and to learn what they know.’

Caroline enjoyed being in an ensemble group where students became friends and would call each other, hang out and go out together. Effie recalled with fondness time spent ‘hanging out in the student lounge’, talking with other students about music and ‘just about anything else’. George remarked that making solid friendships in the music course made him feel like he was ‘in the right place’. Iggy thought that music connections inspired strong friendships and he reasoned that:

‘Not many people at university have the opportunities we had to get to know each other so well.’

Participants were appreciative of the support they received from other students during their time at university. Cora related how she had felt close to the students in the year level above hers. She recalled them acting as mentors for her and her fellow students. Caroline told a story about beginning music classes. She admitted to feeling anxious about her lack of experience and formal knowledge. In the first week of class she met another student, Delaney, who had asked her if she knew 'Hallelujah' by Leonard Cohen. Caroline sang a few lines as Delaney strummed along and was delighted to hear Delaney's smiling praise. Their friendship grew and Caroline acknowledged the support that Delaney had provided for her over the course of their study together.

Students worked collaboratively to support learning. Belinda noted:

'In music it's a tight group because we work a lot together – you need to work collaboratively to get a result.'

Iggy remembered the music classes as safe and supportive environments where:

'Everyone helped each other and there were no feelings of judgement, no pressure if you didn't know it.'

Helena described how musicians and bands all supported one another through positive comments and taking a genuine interest in the musical directions being explored. Several students commented on the supportive environment created through shared interests in music ideas and styles. Students sought one another out and developed friendships and musical partnerships based on common music ground.

4.2.7. Relevance

There was significant discussion around the relevance of music study to students' music lives. Participants acknowledged enjoying studying when they perceived aspects of the course were relevant to them.

A few participants who had graduated from the Bachelor of Music course were now music teachers. They were able to reflect upon the relevance of specific aspects of the course in their careers now. Andrew felt confident that he could teach any syllabus, including AMEB, VCE and ANSCA, and at the time of data

collection was both a private instrumental and High School classroom music teacher. Iggy was also working as a High School music teacher and commented that the music degree had prepared him as a teacher who could 'organise everything I needed to teach successfully'.

Graham was in his fourth year of an education degree. He commented that he had learned:

'Different types of music and ideas that have made me think about all that and how I can pass that on to students in class.'

Caroline was training to be a primary school teacher and felt that music units had taught her a number of skills she could take into the classroom to use in teaching younger children. She believed her music skills and knowledge could be used to improve student engagement.

Many students observed the relevance of music studies to the music activities they engaged with. Dylan believed he was able to incorporate learning about new styles of music into song writing in the several original bands he performed with. Andrew had been performing in Heavy Metal bands for many years and was beginning to become reasonably successful. He marvelled at how his own technique and the sound of the band seemed to improve as he began to apply theory knowledge to improvisation and soloing. Harry was teaching part time at a private music school and was able to demonstrate how new music software he had learned at university could assist in teaching their students. Andrew concluded that knowledge gained in music history and analysis classes was now relevant to music activities he engaged in. He commented that:

'Music tells a story but it's sometimes hard to understand what music is saying. My lecturer told us that 'music is text' and I can see now that it is. I bring this knowledge to my performing and composing now.'

Some students commented that music study had been important to their personal development. Belinda believed the music she had studied had taught her about 'who she was' as a musician *and* as a person. Kyrie observed:

'The course encouraged what I did outside but also to seek out new and different things in my life which then reflected back to the course.'

Cora felt that studying music at university helped her to mature as an individual and contribute more effectively in her church community. She said:

‘Being involved with church and helping people in the course gave me the opportunity to be part of a community where I could connect with people and blend the worlds.’

4.2.8. Facilities, resources and locations

Students highlighted positive aspects of music facilities at the Sunbury, Kindred and the St Albans campuses.

Students were generally positive about the Sunbury campus music facilities. Kyrie thought the music building at Sunbury campus was beautiful and looked ‘like a London music academy’. Ben described the music building at the Sunbury campus as one of the most gorgeous buildings he had ever been in. Effie believed the greatest attraction was the campus’ isolation from distraction. She liked that the students had ‘our own little music department’ to themselves. Dylan was now completing post graduate study at L University and observed that there was less space and it was harder to access the practice and recording studios. He concluded that:

‘I never took the facilities at Sunbury for granted. We had it great and that took a lot of stress out of studying.’

The Sunbury campus was closed by the university in 2010. TAFE music courses found temporary accommodation at Kindred Studios, a rehearsal facility with whom VU would go on to form a partnership in order to create permanent music facilities for both TAFE and Higher Education music courses. Kindred Studios were located in Yarraville, fifteen minutes’ walk from the main Victoria University campus in Footscray. Some students enjoyed the isolation of being in a completely separate environment to the main parts of Victoria University. Bridie said she appreciated the ‘peace and quiet’ of Kindred compared to the Footscray park campus. Gordon found the environment at Kindred ‘relaxed, comfortable and mellow in comparison to other university spaces.’

Others spoke positively about the 'vibrant music scene' at Kindred involving a variety of different music activities. Students enjoyed seeing other bands coming and going for rehearsals and posters advertising upcoming gigs and events. Harry highlighted the live music venue as a strong point of the facility. Fabien exclaimed:

'We have unreal facilities. We've got macs (apple Macintosh computers) which are great for theory classes and the studios are cool open environments perfect for music. The rehearsal rooms are good for single or group use. You have a studio to record...like professional musicians.'

Students identified many enjoyable and rewarding aspects of studying music at Victoria University. They gained specific skills and music knowledge, respected teachers and teaching approaches and appreciated the support and friendship of fellow classmates. Participants acknowledged the role that music education played in their personal growth and career development. They also recognised the importance of suitable facilities and resources in their development as musicians. However, students also faced a range of challenges negotiating music study at Victoria University.

4.3. Challenges of studying music at Victoria University

'Nobody told me there'd be days like these'

['Nobody Told Me', John Lennon](#)

Students raised and explored a range of challenges faced in studying music at Victoria University. Students struggled to adapt to music education environments and deal with challenging attitudes. They struggled to manage the consequences of decisions that negatively affected their studies. Students talked about specific problems gaining music skills and knowledge.

4.3.1. Skills deficits

Participants spoke about beginning study with insufficient music skills and knowledge. Some felt they lacked instrumental proficiency, gaps in academic and music theory skills and inadequate music technology knowhow.

Many participants felt they were deficient in music theory knowledge as they begun tertiary music studies. This made music theory units and other course work difficult. Some compared their own theory skills unfavourably with other commencing students. Iggy said he felt like he was a strong guitarist but didn't possess the background knowledge in theory that other students did. This resulted in him feeling embarrassed and concerned that he wouldn't be able to keep up. Participants studying music in education degrees were very vocal about struggling because of limited music theory knowledge. Belinda exclaimed:

'I thought my understanding of music was quite deep but looking back now – oh my god! I thought that if I loved music I could do it but then I got to theory class and had no idea what they were talking about.'

Many of the education students observed that although they had music performance experience they had not learned 'much or enough' music theory at school to cope with tertiary level music theory. Caroline admitted she found the music theory units very difficult because she had not been introduced to even the basic concepts in her High School music program. Graham was angry and upset about his struggles to cope with music theory. Graham had always played music by ear and could neither write nor read music upon embarking on a music major. He lamented 'If you haven't got a good base it's hard to build a house.'

Many students observed that they lacked various specific performance skills as they set out to study tertiary music. Effie had played violin for 15 years, and completed Grade VI AMEB, but had little experience of contemporary music repertoire and techniques. She recalled that the first eighteen months of the TAFE Diploma of music were particularly challenging for her because of her Classical music background. Other participants struggled with Jazz repertoire. Students struggled to grasp stylistic aspects and to understand and master rhythm and feel. Andrew struggled at first to read Jazz chord charts despite the fact that he thought himself a reasonably competent and experienced guitarist.

Participants commented that they came to music study with a limited understanding of music technology. Farrah struggled with technology because he believed he was not 'good at computers'. Many of the units required students

to learn and use different music software programs in addition to units involving live sound and recording technology. Caroline and Belinda claimed they felt 'overwhelmed' by several facets of music technology. Alana was frustrated by song writing tasks because she had no experience with the technology being used for the projects.

There were references to challenges brought about by a lack of general academic skills. Students moving from TAFE to Higher Education music studies found that they were expected to meet standard academic expectations for written assessments, such as coherent and structured writing, appropriate formatting and conforming to standard referencing. Fundamental academic skills did not specifically feature in TAFE music courses. Cora recalled that 'Cultural Perspectives (a music history and culture unit) was scary because I had no idea about reading and analysing texts'. Whilst Andrew remembered receiving a low grade for a written report early in his second year of study and failing to understand how he had received such a mark for work that he had tried his best at. His tutor explained that he had failed the writing and research component of the assessment and only then did Andrew realise he would need to 'learn these skills if I was going to even pass the course.'

There was discussion about the efficacy of audition process for music courses. Students observed that music skills were sometimes not realistically assessed. There was a perception that some applicants should not have been offered places in a music course. Dylan complained that he had felt frustrated by the lack of some students' musical talent and believed that some were 'hopeless cases' who would never advance to become 'musicians'. Cora was irritated by the 'needless waste of time repetition' required by 'beginner' musicians. However, Kyrie conceded that:

'You couldn't do much about the different levels of musical ability in TAFE – couldn't change the method of audition and selection. I guess it just came down to how many applied and how many were needed.'

4.3.2. Confidence, belonging and self-worth

Many participants reported struggling with low self-esteem and confidence with study and musical abilities. By her own admission Djava was 'not confident at

all'. She felt sad and frustrated that she was unable to speak up or contribute in group situations. Jordan recalled:

'I should have done more and taken opportunities with other students but I was shy and timid and anxious about being put on the spot.'

Others spoke of low self-esteem and insecurities about music skills and academic abilities. Isabelle was passionate about music and had always thought it would be 'amazing' to do a music course. However, she had put off applying for several years because she doubted she was 'good enough' to be accepted. She eventually started in the Certificate IV in Music but collapsed in tears at the end of her first day because she felt that everyone else was far more musically accomplished than her. Isabelle recalled that she seriously contemplated leaving the course due to chronic self-doubt. Caroline had begun two other university courses but had withdrawn due to 'a lack of confidence. She recalled feeling extremely anxious about choosing to study music in the education degree despite limited formal, music experience. Caroline said it had been difficult to stop feeling 'stupid and not good enough'. Other students simply felt that they might have been too hard on themselves.

There was wide ranging discussion about performance anxiety. Emma found recitals confronting because she had always been nervous about performing in front of people. Helena said she always felt 'nervous and scared' when performing. Others observed how performance anxiety could 'just creep up on you' even when well-rehearsed and prepared for public performance. Students became frustrated when they failed to replicate the standard of performance they achieved in private or 'safe' environments, in public contexts. Isabelle recounted an experience of her first year recitals. She recalled:

'I just froze really. It was so disappointing to have practised so hard and then be undone by nerves.'

Some students claimed they had felt alienated starting music study at university. Kyrie said he had found it difficult finding where he 'fitted in' and was reluctant to attend classes. Caitlin remembered feeling 'left out at times' and struggled to join in group activities and to engage with other students. Some students spoke about feeling as though they did not 'belong'. Several students

discussed struggling to find other students to accompany them in recitals. Isabelle worried that other students would not want to play with her because she was 'no good'. As a classically trained violinist, Effie had felt out of place amongst students performing popular repertoire. She had deliberately chosen to enrol in a contemporary music course to broaden her music skills and knowledge but recalled:

'It was a real struggle until I found my feet. I wondered at times whether I'd ever get it...'

4.3.3. Student attitudes

Participants discussed the challenges and frustrations caused by the disruptive behaviour, immaturity and lack of application and ambition of some other students. These 'problem' students were criticised for poor motivation, laziness and failure to attend scheduled and unscheduled classes and activities.

Jordan said of the first year in the Certificate IV course:

'There were lots of people who just got in because it was cheap I think. There was lots of talking and distraction and a lot of 'oh I gotta go to school.'

Kyrie reasoned that some disruptive and disengaged students were only in the course because they were able to claim Centrelink payments. He thought others were there only 'because they didn't know where else to go.' Finn found the incessant chatter and inappropriate comments of some students in class extremely frustrating. He complained:

'That (behaviour) made it difficult to learn sometimes – I used to wish they would just shut up and stop talking and whinging.'

Helena remembered some students in one of her ensemble groups often chatted while the tutor was trying to speak or did not listen to what was being discussed in the group. She recalled that:

'They would never know what was going on and when we had to make decisions about what we would play or how we played it they would just complain and whinge. It was annoying and wasted so much time.'

Dylan recounted a conversation with X who had been constantly disruptive during music history classes. The student had complained to Dylan that the class was boring and the teacher was an 'idiot'. Dylan thought the subject was interesting and challenging and had tried to explain this to X. Dylan recalled:

'He just looked at me blankly. I think X just wanted to play guitar and was not interested in anything about thinking. The subject matter was uncomfortable for him and that's why he was like that.'

Some students expressed frustration at the 'limited' music attitudes of other students. Finn complained:

'Lots of the others didn't explore different styles of music –they just kept on doing the same things they had always done. There was so much more they could have learned and experienced...'

Harry observed with a somewhat pained expression that:

'Some students are not as good as they should be by now. Some have not moved on. The course offers a lot but some don't take advantage of this and I think 'why are you in the course? They are wasting their time. Maybe they thought music was for them and it's not and they just don't realise it.'

Kyrie observed that some students acted as though were still at High School:

'They would say things like 'oh we should do the homework or we'll get in trouble!'

Finn remembered one member of his second year ensemble group as being 'completely annoying'. The student did not get on with anyone else and continually questioned why they had to play a certain piece or perform the music in a particular way. Kyrie observed that the student had had very little life experience and limited exposure to any music other than a narrow range of 'metal' music. Participants complained that some immature vocalists did not understand how much work had to be done by the instrumentalists to properly prepare a piece. Others complained that some younger students in the course were just into 'pop stars' and had 'very immature tastes.'

Participants recounted tensions amongst students. Iggy believed that some students thought they were more talented than others. He observed that this led to condescension and negative judgement from some students. Finn complained that he sometimes found it difficult to find accompanists for recitals because there was a perception that he was into 'weird' music. He thought many students did not want to play 'different styles of music'. Kyrie recalled one group of students who were 'a bit elitist'. They had formed a 'subcommittee' and would only play with one another. Jordan recalled how an ensemble group had asked the singer to leave so they could bring in another student they felt was more accomplished. Jordan felt sorry for him and observed:

'Some students changed from being very willing to do anything for everyone to being more ego-driven and arrogant in their music taste and goals.'

The theme of commitment was raised repeatedly. Perceived lack of commitment frustrated and annoyed many students. Emma exclaimed:

'Other students are not committed. Some lack motivation or they are a long way behind. When people are not motivated or not showing up it's frustrating.'

Alex wondered why students would try out for a course if they were not committed to attending. Harry was so disillusioned by other students' level of commitment he was questioning whether he could go on with the course. He pronounced:

'I could have been better off being in a band or learning it myself at home. I'm really having trouble with the stress of the course (caused by) the problems with students...'

Students talked about the challenges brought about by low levels of enthusiasm and motivation. Isabelle struggled with members of the ensemble group who attended infrequently. She had tried to be positive but admitted she couldn't force other students to become enthusiastic. Isabelle said:

'Some students have no passion to be in the course anymore. It's like they have to be coaxed. You know, if there's no drive, why don't they just stay home?'

Some complained that other students were 'just lazy'. Students observed that poor attitude was often accompanied by a lack of work ethic. Harry complained:

'We had five people in our ensemble group. I would get to university early and ...wait. Two would rock up half an hour late and maybe the others would be here by lunch. It was like that all semester.'

Ben thought generally that there was lack of effort and time for practice amongst the student cohort. He complained that some students rarely attended rehearsals:

'It was just slackness really – if you're committed you turn up.'

Students were extremely vocal about the impact of students who did not attend scheduled classes and rehearsals. Alex recalled one class where only five students regularly attended. He explained how frustrating it was that the same material would need to be explained again the following week. Farrah observed that on average only seven or eight students (from a cohort of twenty students in his year level) attended classes regularly. He believed that those who did not attend probably knew their absence had an impact on the students who did attend but didn't think it was very important to 'turn up'. Emma said:

'I come every day because I don't want to get behind and I want to do the best with the group'. Otherwise what's the point if you're not going to turn up?'

Cora pondered the consequences that might apply to those students who failed to attend regularly. She reasoned that:

'The consequence for people not turning up is that they won't know what is being taught and won't have the knowledge. Some don't have the mentality of 'what will I miss if I don't turn up' but rather 'I don't need to turn up because I won't get in trouble.'

Students hypothesised about the reasons for non-attendance. Fabian reasoned that students might not attend:

'Because they think it's not a big deal if you don't come to uni – it's like 'oh we only had band all day so it doesn't matter if you don't come.'

Harry was incensed:

‘What’s the point of doing the course if you’re not there? You may as well do something else. If you’re not showing up regularly you’re affecting yourself and everyone else.’

Bridie wondered whether some had lost interest or perhaps may have had family commitments or health issues. She believed some students prioritised work which meant they couldn’t attend regularly. Alex said:

‘Maybe they (who do not turn up) have had a late night or are just lazy. Some work and have to leave early but you shouldn’t work if you have class.’

Participants were concerned by students who discontinued study. Students dropping out of courses left gaps in ensemble groups and affected the morale of those students remaining in the course. Alex recalled that in his year level:

‘There were 21 students who started at Certificate IV. Three dropped out straight away and now a year later there are only twelve left.’

Alex was bewildered as to why so many students had chosen to leave the course. Harry had had a similar experience and lamented:

‘It (the course) feels like a sinking ship. It feels like many are here as a thing on the side, like a volunteer thing. The majority left at the end of last year because the course was not a good fit. A couple left because of the teachers and the students...’

Caitlin thought some of the students who had discontinued had done so because the course was not what they expected. Gordon was upset about a close friend who had left the course. He said,

‘He should have even been there just for the recitals – and he pulled out of my recitals just a few days before. I would have been there for him but he wasn’t there for us. I don’t know why...’

4.3.4. Specific units

Students identified particular units of study as challenging and problematic. Many students agreed that music theory was ‘a real struggle’. Respondents found aspects of technology units demanding and some struggled with

composing. Others discussed challenges in relation to performance or instrumental based units. There was animated discussion about live sound/technology units.

Harry said that he struggled to understand how music theory related to what he heard and played. Alana admitted that theory was overwhelming for her and was especially difficult for vocalists who did not play instruments. Andrew recounted that he had not been fond of studying music theory at school. He found Jazz theory particularly confronting and admitted that he didn't really know what was going on until he reached the final year of the course. Jordan explained that he loved performing and practised incessantly. However he confessed:

'I hated theory because I just didn't understand it and didn't think it was relevant.'

Graham had played guitar for many years but did not enjoy the first year music technology unit in his course. He had no experience with recording music or music software and said he felt 'unqualified'. Graham said he found having to use technology he was so unfamiliar with 'overwhelming'. George didn't think learning about and using technology was an important part of music. Bridie said:

'The music recording unit was boring because it was very descriptive and not very practical.'

Kyrie remembered a first year composition unit as overly watered down and simplistic. He felt the teacher did not understand the unit content and questioned whether she knew what she was doing and whether she had really worked in the music industry. Other students discussed a third year composition unit in negative terms. The unit was designed to address modern and post-modern composition history and approaches. Students indicated they struggled to grasp the unit's content and relevance. Iggy said:

'I had no idea what the teacher was on about. I don't think anybody got what that (unit) was about.'

Helena complained that she found this composition unit 'completely irrelevant' to her. She said she tried to negotiate alternative project work with the teacher

but was told she had to complete the standard content. Some students pondered that what teachers think students should be taught, and what and how students would like to be taught, was sometimes very different.

4.3.5. Teaching

Teacher attitudes, instrumental and class teaching styles, course logistics, assessment, and sessional teachers presented particular problems for many students. Alex observed that some teachers were not as committed as others. He complained that they were often late or appeared disinterested when teaching. Alex recalled asking one particular teacher for help and was advised to 'look it up on the internet'. Harry thought that teachers could do more to encourage students and 'deal' with those students he felt were 'slack'. Isabelle believed that the teachers should fail students who didn't turn up or 'cut them from the course'. Several students admitted they were unsure of the consequences put in place by teachers for students who did not attend.

Jordan recalled that in the first year of the TAFE music course there had been no consequences in place for submitting late work. He said 'the students kept pushing things and nothing happened.'

Kyrie was aggrieved that others handed work in late often without penalty and wondered why he should be so diligent. Students judged some teachers negatively for creating class environments they felt were too 'relaxed' or 'unstructured'. There was a belief that some staff didn't create effective learning cultures. George complained that some teachers were very slack and failed to implement consequences that had been promised.

Some students highlighted problems with instrumental teaching. There was a suspicion that some instrumental teachers prioritised learning recital materials over technical work because they saw students' recital marks were a reflection of their teaching prowess. Other students disagreed with instrumental studies teachers about repertoire choice. Effie complained that she was 'forced' to play Classical pieces whereas she had wanted to learn and present contemporary pieces. Effie said:

'We clashed because she (the instrumental studies teacher) was not willing or maybe able to teach me what I needed for the course I was doing.'

Some identified instrumental teachers they thought were competent players but ineffective communicators. Andrew conceded that his guitar teacher was a great player but was not able to 'get through to' him. Cora recalled her second year vocal teacher was unsupportive and took things personally. She told me:

'I was honest with her about what was useful and not useful for me but she did not listen. She could not explain the relevance to me. She did not inspire me.'

Some students complained that there was a disconnection between what was being taught and what they expected they would learn. Dylan wondered whether sometimes teachers only taught what they had experience with rather than what students needed to learn in a particular area. Hung believed that some teachers were not able to contextualise what they were being taught and presented information 'with no complete image'. Fabien thought that perhaps students struggled with some units because:

'The teachers were not able to explain the relevance of the learning in the units to the course or a career in music.'

Some participants complained about overly theoretical teaching styles. Students identified some classes as boring due to an over reliance on theory as opposed to the practical. Cora found it difficult to adapt to teaching that was 'not hands on' and 'too theoretical'. Djava felt her guitar teacher talked too much and showed her what he could do rather than teach her 'practically' how to play. Jordan remembered recording classes where there was:

'A lot of sitting around and watching what was happening with only one at a time learning how to do something.'

Some students commented on pedagogical inconsistencies across the course. Kyrie felt that some teachers did not seem 'to be on the same page'. Cora found it challenging that some teachers would expect high standards and provide structured teaching whereas others 'were pretty slack and joked around'. Farrah was confronted by changing teachers within the same units who 'did things

differently'. He understood that 'everyone is different' but complained that these varied approaches were not explained. Alex concluded that there was a 'lack of organisation in the course at times'.

There was discussion around the nature of assessment in the music courses. Participants complained that criteria for performance assessments could be 'hazy' with some admitting they found it difficult to determine exactly how a given result for a performance was determined. Helena thought that some recital panel members understood the performance criteria better than others, resulting in a lack of understanding between teachers on recital panels. Ben remembered that some subjects he completed did not make it clear what was expected from the assessment in terms of content or standard. Harry felt that advice to students about subject guidelines and assessments were not consolidated across the course. Hung believed that marking in some subjects 'was not strict or involved a lot of personal opinion'.

Most respondents valued the contributions of sessional staff members but some criticised an over-reliance on 'casual teaching'. Kyrie complained that sessional staff were rarely available when he needed to talk to them and ask questions. Harry believed teachers taking core subjects should have been there permanently. Isabelle concluded:

'Too often we were just left to do it (certain subjects) on our own. The course should offer teaching that is full time, not part time.'

4.3.6. Transition from TAFE to Higher Education music study

Eleven participants completed a pathway from the Victoria University Diploma of Music Performance to the Bachelor of Music course. They outlined particular challenges associated with this transition including the distinctive focus of each course, differing expectations and standards and the preparation for transition between courses.

Participants identified that the TAFE and Higher education courses offered different and, sometimes inconsistent, aims and approaches. Dylan believed that the TAFE music course 'only' offered a performance focus whereas the

music degree offered a more general music education. Kyrie had enjoyed the emphasis on rehearsing and performing in TAFE music and said:

‘I missed not playing as much when I went into the degree. There was more of a concentration on the theory of music and the academic side of things.’

Participants made reference to different music stylistic foci between the TAFE and Higher Education courses. Dylan found the degree course was far more Jazz orientated than the TAFE music course. He had enjoyed pursuing a wide range of popular repertoire in the TAFE music course but experienced the degree course as narrower and perhaps not as encouraging on those styles. Ben observed:

‘I thought I was at a certain level when I finished the TAFE course but I then (transitioning to the degree course) realised that with Jazz I was not really at that level.’

Students observed the difference in expectations between the TAFE and degree music courses. Cora reflected:

‘TAFE standards were not as high as in Higher Education. I wonder why the TAFE course needed to be so ‘cruisy’.’

Iggy recalled that:

‘Going into the Bachelor of Music stepped up the expectations. I did a little bit of referencing and stuff in TAFE but I didn’t realise that I’d have to use it later on. I should have listened and learned more!’

Students commented that they had to ‘step up’ once they begun the degree course. Cora had known it was going to be a big step up going into the degree (from TAFE) because friends in higher year levels had warned her. Iggy agreed saying:

‘I felt that the transition from TAFE to Higher Education was a really big jump in what was expected. More (was expected) from performance, writing, theory, everything.’ The TAFE course was equivalent in terms of credit but not necessarily the curriculum.’

Participants concluded they needed a more suitable preparation for Higher education study. Andrew judged that learning in the TAFE music course should have been 'stricter' in order to better prepare students for the rigour of the degree music course. He exclaimed:

'They could have prepared us better for those years better in TAFE. Suddenly we were reading articles and doing essays and getting penalties for late work. There was none of that in TAFE. We should have been warned. The transition was crazy – everyone was complaining. It was like 'Surprise – welcome to the degree!'

There was consensus amongst the students who had completed the transition that the degree course involved fewer practical components than the TAFE course. There was also the belief that the degree course included more theory, aural and academic work including aspects such research and referencing. Ben observed:

'These were new things I had to learn how to do. TAFE didn't do these things, didn't prepare us for that.'

Dylan recalled that many Higher Education subjects required substantial introductions to help content and expectations that were not addressed in TAFE study. Iggy suggested that curriculum areas such as aural training, improvisation and rhythmic dictation should have been taught in the second year of the TAFE course, as an introduction to content in the degree. Participants noted that certain curriculum content was not aligned between the TAFE and Higher Education courses. Dylan recalled that in the TAFE course he had had one teacher who had taught Classical Theory. However, when Dylan had entered the degree course he complained that the teacher taught 'Jazz theory' which was different and 'a real struggle'.

Some students observed that teachers from different courses did not communicate clearly about how classes, materials and teaching approaches should be planned and delivered. Cora suggested:

'TAFE teachers should have looked at what was being taught in Higher Education and introduce it in TAFE classes.'

4.3.7. Time for learning and the work/life balance

There was significant discussion about time allocated for teaching and learning music. Conversations focused on the length of courses and/or units of study, the allocated amount of units in courses and time available for study in stretched and busy lives.

Many students argued that more contact hours should have been allocated for some units of study. Participants agreed that the Higher Education courses offered too few hours for many of the subjects. Ben felt that all performance units needed at least twice the hours allocated to enable students to learn the breadth and depth of repertoire required. A course restructure resulted in three music theory subject areas in the music degree being collapsed into one unit with reduced contact hours. Students thought this decision was 'crazy' and that these core areas needed 'much more time'. Andrew observed:

'The degree course was two days a week compared to four days a week in the TAFE course. This was not enough time because there's more you need to ask and know in later years, not less...'

Iggy complained:

'The music degree felt rushed, frantic and stressful. We didn't have enough time to spend as we needed to learn everything'. There was never enough class time to get done what we need to do.'

Students also agreed that twelve weeks (the allocated weeks in a standard semester of study) was insufficient for music units given the sheer volume of learning required. Some commented that less time spent in subjects and fewer weeks spent at university negatively impacted the nature and quality of the music community at Victoria University.

Those students undertaking music as part of an education degree were particularly vocal about the number of units offered. Students were required to complete six units of music study to satisfy course and teacher registration requirements. There was consensus amongst this cohort that six units of study was 'not nearly enough' for those wishing to be music teachers. Students

agreed that there needed to be more practical and theory music units. Graham complained:

‘There was not enough music study. Six units have not been enough for me to be a music teacher.’

Belinda was incredulous, exclaiming ‘You’d really think you’d have more than one unit per semester to be a music teacher!’ Students agreed that they all needed to study more music theory throughout the course. Elle stated:

‘Theory was a lot to learn in a short space of time. It (the theory content) should have taken years, not two semesters’. ’

Respondents discussed balancing work and family with study commitments. Caitlin worked 9am-5pm, three days a week, in a chemist store. She told me she had to work these hours to earn the money she needed for rent, bills and music lessons. Caitlin said she spent nights doing homework, resulting in virtually ‘no time for anything else’. Caroline reported:

‘I usually work twenty-five hours a week – it’s hard to get balance right. I can probably only do about ten hour’s homework a week. It’s a heavy load.’

Andrew said he had taught guitar privately for 30 hours a week while doing the music degree in order to pay university debts and afford living expenses. Mature age students with children complained that they rarely ever experienced ‘real’ holidays because they used university breaks to work full time.

4.3.8. Meeting music course expectations

Students discussed the challenges of understanding and meeting the expectations music studies at VU. Students undertaking music as part of education courses were particularly vocal about the pre-requisites, structure and outcomes of their course. Participants also discussed differences between perceptions and the realities of course experiences.

Nine participants in this study had completed or were completing a music major (or ‘specialisation’) as part of their undergraduate education course. The Bachelor of Education offered many specialist areas, including music, for

students to undertake in addition to core education units. Students typically completed between four and eight units in specialist areas and all specialist unit sequences were designed to meet or exceed Victorian Institute of Teaching minimum requirements for teaching in those areas. Most specialist areas, including music, did not mandate particular pre-requisite qualifications but rather encouraged students to have prior experience or interest in the specialist areas they intended to undertake.

Participants expressed surprise and frustration that there had been no specific pre-requisites required to take a music major. Belinda exclaimed:

‘The education course said you didn’t need prior music experience to do music which was strange – how could you do algebra if you’d never done trigonometry?’

Students agreed that there ought to have been strict requirements about entry into the music specialisation. Most students agreed that the challenges presented by meeting theory expectations and building sufficient practical music skills were brought about by disparity between course content and limited music skills and knowledge.

George completed a two year Diploma of Music prior to articulating into the Bachelor of Education. He confessed he felt ‘sorry’ for other students who were ‘really struggling’ because of limited music backgrounds. He exclaimed:

‘Anyone can enrol in music, pick music as a major. I’m not sure how that came about. Pretty amazing, you’re supposed to then teach music – that’s scary!’

Graham was forthright in his criticism. He complained that the music education units had been incredibly challenging for him. He had contemplated quitting the whole course but decided he should keep going because he was so passionate about becoming a teacher. Graham said:

‘Since first year, its (studying music as part of an education degree) been horrible. They said no pre-requisites were necessary. I thought that meant we would start from scratch but from day one the teacher has talked about things I’d never heard of...I thought I was going to learn everything but perhaps it’s only (music in education) for those who have

done VCE music? I haven't been able to learn as much because I'm always catching up. Maybe it was my mistake and I should have done more music study prior to starting. But the pre-requisites said nothing...'

Most of the music education participants were adamant they were 'not ready' to teach music in schools. Fabien lamented:

'If you're the teacher you're supposed to know the music curriculum but there are so many steps to get to even the basic level – and I'm not there.'

Elle decided that she would not apply for music teaching positions because she did not feel 'anywhere near able' to teach music in schools. Even George, having completed two years of TAFE music study and a further two music units at third year level said'

'I just don't feel ready (to teach music) and I've done all this study – which is scary. I'm not sure if that's Victoria University doing that to me?'

Students compared expectations of studying music at Victoria University with actual experiences. Finn understood that the Bachelor of Music course was performance based but said he was given the impression that he could concentrate more on composition. He was disappointed that he had not been provided with the space to 'create my own work'. There were differences of opinion about the stylistic foci of music courses. Dylan believed that Victoria University had a 'contemporary' emphasis whilst Isabelle thought the university favoured 'popular music'. George was unsure but thought the courses were 'Jazz mostly'. Andrew was adamant that 'TAFE music was 'pop' and the Bachelor (of music) was Jazz. Ben felt that the musical emphasis changed from year to year and was 'unsure really what the course was meant to be' (in terms of a primary music focus).

Effie said she had experienced a range of challenges. As a musician skilled at reading music and used to relying written scores for performances, Effie found the contemporary music skills such as emphasis on 'chord charts and playing by ear' daunting. During the first few months of the TAFE music course she continually sought out full scores for the music that was being rehearsed. When asked to take an improvised solo in a piece for a performance platform class,

Effie enquired 'where it was written so that I could read and learn it!' Effie admitted that she 'had very little knowledge of contemporary music and was reluctant to move away from Classical repertoire.'

Recitals proved to be particularly challenging for Effie. She had little experience of contemporary repertoire and when she opted to present Classical repertoire for recitals she wondered:

'Maybe I was not assessed fairly because I did Classical pieces for recitals? The assessments and the criteria were not suited to Classical style...'

4.3.9. Student background and interests

There was some interesting discussion about the connection between university music study and students' music backgrounds and interests. Many commented that the interview and discussions as part of this research were the first opportunity they had had to talk about themselves and where they had come from. Participants commented that it often seemed that what they did at university was wholly separate from external music activities. Andrew clearly revelled in detailing his history with Metal bands and culture but observed that the content of the course rarely had 'anything to do with' 'his' music. Effie had wanted to study contemporary music at university but felt like 'no-one really knew' her because they had no idea about her extensive orchestral experiences outside of university. Many students played and attended one another's gigs but saw these activities as being different and removed from music study. Kyrie remarked:

'I was playing in cool venues and heaps of people were coming (to gigs). But my teachers didn't know that – they only knew when I wasn't there or what mark I got for Improv...'

There was a theme established that music education either 'did not care or know' about the (outside) music activities and musical lives of the students. Many students clearly felt that music interests were an integral part of their identities. Others implied that although family issues, work commitments and relationships impacted upon university life, these experiences were not

accounted for in music education contexts. Many students indicated that they felt aggrieved that external factors were not taken into account in teaching and assessment. Ben wondered whether anyone would have cared if he had slept on 'someone else's couch' the night before class because he was practically homeless at times. Harry admitted he missed class sometimes because he couldn't afford the petrol for his car and complained that one teacher told him to 'take the train'.

4.3.10. Facilities

Participants spoke about a range of challenges associated with facilities. Up until 2010 both the TAFE and Higher Education programs were based in purpose built music facilities at the Sunbury campus of Victoria University. The Sunbury campus was approximately an hour's drive from the CBD and thirty minutes' drive from the main campus at Footscray Park. A country line train serviced Sunbury but the campus itself was thirty minutes' walk from the station. For many students the campus location was a problem. Effie exclaimed:

'I was spending four hours a day on public transport. It was so crazy – people would be saying 'why are you going all the way to Sunbury'? I obviously loved it to do that but it was a huge challenge.'

Finn had moved from NSW and did not realise how far out of town the Sunbury campus was. He had thought Sunbury would be fine until he realised how far it was from his home in Collingwood. Dylan and Cora both decided they needed to buy a car if they were going to stay in the course. They admitted to not really being in a position to afford the loans. Several students conceded that they missed lectures regularly because of issues with distance and accessing the campus.

Some participants described the Sunbury campus as 'a ghost town'. Dylan recalled:

'There were no people to talk to! University is about learning as well as meeting people and there were very few you could meet.'

Others observed that it was unusual to find a music department in a town where there was no real music culture to speak of. Kyrie regretted that studying in

Sunbury meant that students weren't able to go out to gigs easily from university. Jordan concluded:

'Studying in Sunbury wasn't vibrant or bustling but a bit like a ghost town where people only went when they had to. For things to be spontaneous people have to be around.'

Following the closure of the Sunbury campus in 2010 Victoria University TAFE and Higher Education music programs were hastily relocated to the Footscray Nicholson, Footscray Park and St Albans campuses. TAFE music programs were housed in Footscray Nicholson campus but as no music facilities existed, Kindred Music studios, a private music business offering rehearsal studio space for hire nearby, was approached for assistance. TAFE music programs were able to lease a number of spaces at Kindred and work was begun between Kindred and TAFE music to construct purpose built music spaces for tertiary music delivery. Students undertook classes at both the Footscray Nicholson campus and Kindred.

TAFE music respondents disliked having to travel between Kindred and Footscray Nicholson for different classes. Others complained about the challenges of having to complete music studies in a facility that was being built as they learned. Isabelle agreed, remarking:

'When you are trying to concentrate in class and there are bands downstairs and noise everywhere - it gives you a headache. It's difficult. Trying to do tests is frustrating. It would make a big difference if everything was finished and properly sound proofed.'

George complained:

'When I went to university after school I thought it would be a step up in terms of facilities. Having the proper facilities would have helped our learning more.'

4.3.11. University decisions affecting study experiences

Students engaged in passionate discussion about decisions by the university that negatively affected their university study experiences. Campus closures, course arrangements and discontinuations and facilities and resources

provision presented particular challenges for participants. Decisions were often perceived as not being in the students' best interests and some participants felt that they did not have, or were denied, a voice in decision making affecting their study experience.

Decisions made regarding instrumental studies created challenges for some participants. Participants complained that the policy of employing casual (rather than permanent) instrumental teachers resulted in inferior, inconsistent and sometimes disengaged teaching. Students remarked that instrumental teachers did not feel like part of the course or 'proper' staff members. Dylan observed that the instrumental studies program 'felt like an add-on'. He reflected that some instrumental teachers appeared apathetic or disengaged. Students commented that complaints and suggestions about changing or improving instrumental programming were not listened to or acted upon.

University administrative processes and decisions presented challenges for many students. University timetables were 'confusing' for some participants whilst online support was 'difficult to navigate'. University sites for online learning were 'clunky and unmanageable.' George related a story about applying for 'Recognised Prior Learning (RPL)' for completing a TAFE music course. He complained:

'That process took about six months to work it all out! I had to follow up a lot. It wasn't the clearest process...'

Many respondents were disappointed by the university's decision to close the Sunbury campus in 2010. Ben had thoroughly enjoyed studying at the Sunbury campus. He thought it was a 'beautiful place' and it was close to where he lived. He remarked that 'it was a real shame that facility was just lost'. Ben was scathing:

'So much time and money was spent on creating a music facility to (now) just see it sit there empty and going to waste.'

Kyrie was extremely frustrated by what he saw as the slow demise of the Sunbury campus and observed:

'Over the years I was there Sunbury went from a campus with a vibe, people and activities to courses moving to other campuses and the

support for the campus just fading away. It made me angry. The café was open less, student services (were) closing and less was happening for all the students there.'

George said he felt angry and disenfranchised. He exclaimed:

'I was told the campus and course was closing and I thought 'they can't do that can they'? They just scrapped it without explanation and didn't ask us what we felt. So we had to move from Sunbury. An important person from the university came to a meeting with everyone half way through the year. Everyone was concerned and there didn't seem to be any firm plan about where we would go. It seemed really unfair and poorly planned. It made me feel powerless – no-one wanted the course to close and I didn't get to finish my music degree. I was not happy. The teachers were not to blame, they tried everything but...'

Participants complained vehemently about the university's decision to discontinue the Bachelor of Music degree in 2010. George was completing the TAFE music course at this time and was devastated at not being able to complete the Bachelor of Music and Graduate Diploma in music as he had planned to do all along. Cora complained:

'Now after TAFE there's nowhere to go to do music – there's no inspiration for people for the future and no pathways in music that are attractive.'

Hung exclaimed:

'Then they scrapped it (the Bachelor of Music course) and it was like that was half way through my intended course and I feel like I didn't get to finish the course I started. None of us did – and it was a good course.'

Kyrie told me he had been so sad and angry at the decision to discontinue the course, recalling the sequence of events:

'The course was closing then. So this meant that they took the second year students away. So in my final year, that wrecked the whole of my year. I don't think they gave a shit about the impact that this had on students. The whole curriculum and the way it was taught depended

upon second and third year being together and we did not get that opportunity. The teachers cared but the university just left us like sheep in a paddock to die. They cleaned their hands of it and took no responsibility. The teachers taught with no less fervour but it was a shit way to end the course.'

Ben said he had admired how two third year Bachelor of Music students at the time had interviewed all students in the course about the decision to cancel the course. He admitted that the coordinators and teachers lobbied against the decision as well. Ben appeared utterly deflated that despite reasoned and passionate pleas for reconsideration of the decision no-one else in the university had paid any attention. Finn agreed and added:

'Victoria University did not listen to us. Not a single person outside the music department came and spoke to us about why the course was closing or realistic plans about our future and I think this illustrates a complete lack of respect. Either they didn't care about the impacts on students or didn't care about us in the first place. I told my mum, who is a High School teacher and she thought it was pathetic. I would have loved to sit down with the Vice Chancellor and ask her the questions ten times – she would not have been able to answer.'

Kyrie concluded:

'Reflecting now would I recommend that people go to Victoria University?
I don't know. The focus just does not seem right...'

Participants discussed arrangements made by the university following the decisions to close campuses and courses. Students identified makeshift facilities and course arrangements as 'inadequate' and 'completely unsuited' to effective music study. George felt that was unfair because:

'If you're learning is being stepped up at university then the facilities should be there as well. Plus you're paying fees so you'd expect appropriate facilities wouldn't you?'

Isabelle agreed:

‘They expect our learning to be at university level but the university can’t provide the facilities and support to match that. I don’t know who is responsible – not the teachers who try to listen and get students’ point across. It would be good to know who is actually...’

Participants complained about ‘not having a voice’ or being listened to in university decision making. Cora exclaimed:

‘The heads of the university never asked our opinion about the campus or the course decisions. They didn’t care. It was all about money in the end.’

Kyrie told me that after the decision to discontinue the course was announced, he felt reluctant to approach staff with ‘minor issues’ because he reckoned the teachers all had enough to do trying to save the campus and the course. Kyrie ‘just tried to deal with things myself and battle on’. Andrew summed up feelings of powerlessness claiming:

‘We had a right to be pissed off and ask questions but really who could you ask? I know they wouldn’t care anyway...’

Clearly students faced many and varied challenges during their time studying music at Victoria University. Participants spoke of the challenges faced negotiating different attitudes and personalities and about personal issues affecting their studies. They raised concerns about curriculum and pedagogy and the impacts of bureaucratic decision making upon music education experiences. Despite the numerous challenges of studying music at VU many participants were still keen to comment on community aspects of their studies.

4.4. Community and music at Victoria University

‘Say what they may, all of my friends were there.

Not just my friends, but their best friends too’

[‘All of My Friends Were There’, Ray Davies](#)

Students were asked to comment on the role and nature of ‘community’ in music studies at the university. The discussions were wide ranging. Participants identified different notions and levels of community in the several locations where music was delivered. Perceptions and descriptions of ‘community’ were

varied. Some decided there was in fact no community and others observed that, despite the existence of music communities, they did not feel part of them.

The Kindred facility was identified by some participants as a music community. Alex described the space as:

‘Having other (non-Victoria University) musicians and industry around you at Kindred is beneficial and it’s nice to interact and form bonds with like-minded people and create a good vibe.’

Emma thought that:

‘Everyone here at Kindred is into music and is friendly. It’s just one big music community. (Whether from) University, Kindred, everyone comes here for one reason – music. That creates the community.’

Gordon believed everyone who used the Kindred space were close ‘like a musical family’. You feel comfortable because you know everyone’. Others believed the space operated as a community because new friendships developed through music, gigs and other music activities were always being organised and there was ‘always something (music related) going on. Caitlin compared the ‘Kindred community’ to studying at Footscray Nicholson where she claimed there was a ‘different vibe too much like university.’

Music education students agreed they had created their own community within the larger university and education community. Belinda described her experience:

‘I’m friends with others (studying music) not just at university but outside of university. In ensemble groups you get to know each other pretty well. This type of community isn’t the same in other areas of the university.’

Students felt that ensemble classes promoted the feeling of being in a ‘little family’. Belinda smiled as she described her and her fellow music students walking to (music) class with instruments draped over shoulders. It was ‘really cool feeling part of that group’. Fabien declared:

‘I’ve definitely felt part of a community (studying music at Victoria University). I knew all the other students and all the other teachers. We were really all mates.’

Ben declared the music department was:

‘A community where we helped each other to achieve. Groups of people hung out between classes and there was a student lounge which was always full.’

Helena observed that the community spirit in the department meant that students from different year levels came to know one another and form friendships. Dylan said that the community atmosphere helped him feel close to the teachers and to see them as mentors rather than as hierarchical figures.

Effie fondly remembered the music department as:

‘A community based on people, not skills and competition. I wanted to come to class, stay back and spend time with those people. I wanted to engage with people, try different things. Friendship was definitely important. This happened between classes, sharing challenges, working for recitals where you would get to know people better. You were often there five days a week and being required to be there that amount of time fostered much of this feeling. It worked really well because everyone knew everyone else. The expectations of study were different – it was more personal. When people left, the community was affected – they noticed.’

Kyrie recalled a senior student who used to make lunch every day for everyone in the student lounge:

‘We had a very good community. We ate together and got along, had things in common and cheered each other on.’

Dylan agreed saying:

‘Absolutely there was a music community and it was a better community than I’d been part of previously.’

Andrew observed that it was easier to create and maintain a community because most of his fellow students had studied together for so long. He recalled:

‘Everyone would stay around and chat together. We had a student lounge and we could get to know each other and had a chance to

actually develop a community. Even though we were all busy there was a community atmosphere and an acceptance of each other despite differences.'

In contrast, other participants considered that there had only been limited notions of community. Alex enjoyed studying at Kindred but viewed his study experience as a series of friendships rather than a community per se. He thought Kindred might become a strong community as time went on. Djava declared that the TAFE music course could have been a much better community because the first and second years did not mix together. Harry was somewhat despondent in observing that:

'Sometimes there feels like there is a community when people put in but not often. If everyone is bummed, everyone gets more bummed...'

Bridie thought that students did not take advantage of the 'Kindred community'. She observed that many students did not speak to people who were not part of music courses and felt that there should be more communication between courses and outside of courses. Alex and Isabelle agreed with these observations and felt that more efforts could be made by 'teachers and the university' to create more of a 'community vibe'.

George had been caught up in the closure of the Sunbury campus and lamented that there was now no community of music at Victoria University because:

'We left Sunbury and then had no real facilities and we were split between Kindred and Footscray Nicholson. It was like is 'do we even have a music department anymore?'

Graham was adamant there was no community (studying music at the St Albans campus) because being in a community meant seeing people out of university and forming closer friendships. He claimed:

'People are here to get their degree and get out of here. It would be good if there was more of a community – but university is always changing, people change and move on.'

Elle thought at first music at St Albans might be a 'tiny community', but then reconsidered remarking:

'We're not really a community - more like a class only. It's about connectedness and I don't feel part of a community, if there is one...'

Alana observed:

'The people doing music in education and arts know each other but I didn't know music existed until I started studying it and had not heard anything about it. It seems to be really swept under the rug in a way. It's all a bit hidden.'

Some participants observed that they felt disenfranchised from music communities at university. Finn recounted a story of travelling to class, sitting for two hours and leaving without having spoken to any other student. Jordan recalled that he would finish class and not really interact with other students. Helena said that sometimes she didn't feel part of the community.

Many students defined music experiences at Victoria University as spaces and places characterised by friendship, support, fun and communal activities. Participants defined music communities as contexts where like-minded people came together to create and use these spaces and places. Other participants had different perspectives and did not consider music study as being a part of a community. Some agreed that music communities did exist but felt isolated or excluded from them.

4.5. Improving music study at Victoria University

'So teach me now that things can only get better'

['Things Can Only Get Better', Peter Cunah and Jamie Petrie](#)

Discussions raised ideas about how music study could be improved.

Suggestions included examining course selection processes, altering course structures, rethinking certain pedagogical aspects and creating institutional environments that better met the needs of students.

4.5.1. Course selection

Participants argued that students with negative or challenging attitudes could be better identified (and not admitted to courses) through more rigorous audition processes. Harry thought that auditions and interviews should include a method of 'determining a true instinct for music'. Caitlin agreed with this approach but conceded teachers could only find out so much from an interview. Others felt strongly that 'commitment' needed to be *demonstrated* rather than merely spoken about by applicants.

Many students urged more effective screening of applicants' attitudes and motivations to create 'better learning cultures'. These comments related closely to some of the concerns expressed by participants about problematic student attitudes. There was consensus that music courses should only offer opportunities to those who *genuinely* wanted to learn about music.

Some students proposed 'tougher' entrance requirements for music courses. Iggy noted that music courses at many other universities required completion of VCE music or minimum AMEB levels as pre-requisites to study. Cora was critical of students applying for Victoria University music courses needing only to demonstrate 'low or mediocre' music skills and knowledge at the audition to be offered a place at the university. Cora urged selection panels to:

'Expect better students and only choose students who could reasonably be expected to become musicians of a very high standard.'

4.5.2. Aspects of the course

Students made suggestions for changes to various facets of music courses. Ben proposed extending the recital program over several weeks so that students had more time to prepare, more time between recitals and increased opportunities to perform on more recitals. Kyrie wondered whether one year of the course should be set aside just for performance units so that students could engage in the 'deep learning' that instrumental studies required, free from the 'distractions' of other areas of the music curriculum.

Many participants suggested that music courses should provide more study support for students. Students argued that the university needed to provide

additional classes in certain subjects for students to attend if they felt they were falling behind or needed 'extra help'. It was suggested that sessional staff be paid to be available before or after scheduled classes for consultation and discussion about issues students might have with the unit content. There was also support for the involvement of student mentors in aspects of the music teaching. Suitable students - graduates or senior students - could assist in tutorials and workshops or provide extra tutorials and practice sessions. Student mentors could even be assigned to students at the beginning the course.

Several participants raised the idea of offering 'major areas of study' such as performance, composition, music technology, music education and music history and culture. There seemed to be consensus that course structures could mandate certain 'core' or 'common units' involving 'foundation' and 'fundamental' areas of music education that would then offer a choice of subjects in certain areas 'to specialise in'. Thus students would be able to opt for specific areas of music curriculum they were particularly interested in and that led to different graduate outcomes and career paths.

There was agreement that additional time should be provided to improve the learning experience. Some participants felt that three years of undergraduate study was insufficient to 'learn everything'. Some participants who completed the two year TAFE music diploma and then articulated into second year of the Bachelor of Music felt that they probably needed another year of study, or perhaps should have begun at the first year level.

Many students argued that music units should involve more contact hours. There was concern expressed that universities seemed to be reducing scheduled teaching when in fact students wanted 'more time with teachers and to learn'. George complained:

'The university is constantly cutting hours when really they should be giving music students more time to learn everything.'

Delaney thought the structure of the academic year was 'upside down' arguing that students needed to spend more time studying than being on breaks. She proposed that:

‘Semesters should be longer so that you can fit more in and not lose touch with what you’re learning over holidays that are too long anyway.’

There were several suggestions about specific music units. Dylan proposed that technology and composition units could be integrated due to their natural synergies. There were a number of comments about ensuring that music theory was made relevant to the whole course. Caitlin really struggled with nerves when performing and several other students agreed with her suggestion for classes dealing specifically with performance anxiety and nerves.

Ben had experienced ongoing medical issues related to instrumental practice and proposed specific classes that taught injury prevention and safe performance and practice techniques. Graham thought there should be more classes that involved discussion about other music cultures and styles. Helena suggested that performance recitals should examine instrumental technique in addition to assessing only the performance of repertoire.

There was strong support for the idea of foundation courses or study programs preceding undergraduate music study. Kyrie suggested that students who had not completed VCE music or a ‘decent AMEB level’ could be required to complete a foundation or TAFE Certificate IV course before being allowed into the degree. Others agreed with this proposition. Effie suggested the university could offer a summer course for less experienced students to enhance those students’ chances of successful admission into the course. Emma argued all students admitted into a music course should:

‘Have to complete an intensive at the start (that included) technical stuff, academic expectations etc...all the stuff you need to know to actually do the course well.’

Students agreed that music courses needed a cohesive and structured outline from start to finish. Iggy felt this was particularly important for courses that involved both TAFE and Higher Education components. Hung suggested that all courses should ‘link more closely’ subject areas like music technology and music theory so that ‘everything your studying makes more sense’. Harry felt that units should be more ‘aligned’ and that ‘all the teachers should know what each other is doing.’

4.5.3. Teaching

There were several suggestions related to teaching and learning culture, instrumental studies units, expectations of learning and communicating with teachers.

There was consensus that one-to-one instrumental teaching was essential to any level or type of music studies. Participants agreed that all music courses should include individual instrumental tuition throughout the course. Some suggested that one-to-one teaching should be extended to other classes such as music theory and academic research and writing skills – particularly for those students who were facing specific challenges in these areas. There was also significant argument made for small class sizes based on a workshop or tutorial environment as the preferred pedagogical approach for teaching music. Students agreed that learning music required spaces and places that promoted ‘conversing, sharing and learning.’

Participants thought courses needed to provide more effective and structured collaborative learning opportunities. Jordan suggested that students from different courses and year levels could be organised to collaborate on projects to enhance cooperation and sharing different music skills and knowledge. Ben suggested that students from the TAFE music technology courses could record and mix performance students through the year for the mutual learning and social benefits for both cohorts. Students agreed generally that structured collaborative projects across music and creative arts courses would lead to greater engagement and more effective learning.

Some respondents suggested that music teachers and coordinators needed to create a stronger sense of community. Graham argued that classes could be more aligned and that clearer expectations of class behaviour and expectations should be established. Alex urged that all teachers should demonstrate high and equal levels of professionalism. He argued that teachers should understand that they needed to create ‘respectful environments from the very start’. Caitlin thought there should be greater social aspects built into the course. There was general agreement for Delaney’s proposal that music should be more present in

university. Others urged for more informal, out-of-class activities such as choirs, to assist with developing a community culture.

There were suggestions that music and academic expectations needed to be raised and made clearer. Cora argued that expectations needed to be clearly established from the beginning of the course. Isabelle agreed that setting and enforcing higher standards would 'make students more proficient and confident'. Others suggested that subject and course information be consolidated from the beginning and throughout the course so that everyone was clear about what was expected of them. Caitlin suggested that each year level should build higher expectations to prepare students for the subsequent year's study. Djava proposed that the course should 'teach leadership.' There was some support for an exclusion policy for students who did not attend regularly or repeatedly failed units.

Some participants argued for greater teacher contact with teachers. Students argued that all staff should be more present and available. Kyrie offered:

'students need the opportunity to be able to talk to teachers on an ongoing basis about their experiences and problems in classes.'

Students suggested that teachers should be generally more aware of those not attending or contributing and address these matters more effectively. Jordan suggested there should be 'more testing and feedback to see how we progressing'.

4.5.4. Course and institution suitability for students

Students argued that courses needed to be better designed to meet learning styles and backgrounds, course and unit outcomes and career credentials. A majority of participants agreed that students wanting to teach music at High School level should complete a Bachelor of Music degree followed by a post graduate diploma of education. Kyrie remarked that:

'Doing music as part of a Bachelor of Education is watering down the importance of all the music areas and not meeting the needs of students. For a general primary teacher it's fine but anyone who wants to be a music teacher needs to be do a music degree. It's not fair any other way.'

Fabien agreed that it was better for prospective High School music teachers to complete undergraduate music qualifications followed by a post graduate teaching course. Fabien argued that this approach would result in:

‘Four times the amount (of music study) we have done and just think of the level and amount you could teach then!’

4.5.5. Facilities

A few participants made specific suggestions related to facilities. Some felt that music facilities should be located in the main areas of the university. Graham reasoned that the music building (should) be in Footscray to contribute to the university culture. Alex suggested it would be ideal to have Kindred style facilities in the middle of the main campus because there would be energy and interaction between other courses.

Participant experiences of tertiary music education helped them to make informed and valuable suggestions about how music courses could be designed and taught to better meet the learning and graduate outcomes for music students.

4.6. Student voices

‘And it’s your young voice

Keeping me holding on’

[‘Your young voice’, King Creosote](#)

I asked students what they thought about discussing their music backgrounds and experiences of studying music at Victoria University. Students appeared delighted and grateful to be given the opportunity to tell their stories. They were able to recount fond memories, analyse their progress and have individual experiences and achievements acknowledged. They shared passionate and personal stories. Some participants indicated that those responsible for teaching them *should* know about them.

Isabelle was surprised by how she felt about the interview. She added:

‘It’s been good to talk about all this actually – to go through where I started to where I am now, to be able to see that, like a storyline. I think our stories are important...’

Gordon exclaimed:

‘This (the interview) has been the first opportunity I’ve had to elaborate on what I do outside of university, which has been really good. It would be great if the course and teachers understood the musical influences leading up to the course.’

Dylan agreed, claiming:

‘Teachers should know the students’ story and where they’ve come from. It helps teachers to know how to teach them’

Kyrie elaborated, declaring that:

‘The university needs to understand the music experiences and influences that led to people coming into the course so they can understand where the student wants to go musically and help them to get there. That knowledge might affect the way teachers teach or what they teach.’

Djava observed that the interview had allowed her to see how far she had come. She appeared genuinely delighted to realise how proud she was. She said:

‘I never thought I’d have the opportunity to come to university to be honest because I didn’t finish school and didn’t think it was an option. And now I’m nearly finished a music course at university!’

George summed up the thoughts of many of the participants:

‘Students should be allowed to say what we think about the course. Teachers should ask us. Surveys are not this and we don’t know what happens with these – we need a better way to communicate. There should be notice of what we say and they should show us how they are trying to fix the problems we are raising. What students say and think about the course should be taken seriously and acted upon.’

4.7. Coda: concluding comments

The focus groups and in depth interviews elicited a wealth of information about participant experiences of tertiary music study at VU. Stories were complex and personal. Students recounted challenges, learning opportunities, belonging and notions of self. They voiced strong and considered opinions and relished the opportunity to have their say. The next chapter includes 13 stories I wrote before and during this investigation. The stories represented my attempts to capture key moments and feelings to illustrate my experiences as a music academic at VU and encapsulate important observations of the students I have worked with over this time. These vignettes allowed my voice to be heard amidst those of the students. Heard together, these voices chorused important themes, discussed in detail in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Chapter 5. **Let me you tell you a story: music education vignettes**

This chapter includes 13 stories, or vignettes, I wrote over a period of several years prior to and during the early stages of my doctoral research. I created the stories based on thoughts and feelings recorded in work journals throughout my time as a music teacher and coordinator at Victoria University. The stories attempt to capture (and encapsulate) my music education experiences and observations through narrative. I wrote these stories to create windows into some of the challenges and celebrations of music education at Victoria University. The vignettes augment the data provided through student discussions and add my voice to those of the students. Analysis of the stories is undertaken as part of the discussion chapters that follow.

5.1. Question and answer

I've been frustrated over the years by some students who don't attend classes consistently (as they are expected to do) or do so with varying levels of engagement. I wonder why I get so frustrated. Do other coordinators care whether their students turn up or not? Do teachers simply accept that there will always be a significant number of students who are 'slack'? Is it pride, insecurity or vanity that leads me to worry that students are not attending or engaging because I have not been able to offer them a good enough reason to turn up? Why would a student apply for a music course, successfully gain entrance and then either not show up or seemingly not care about it?

I think it's important that students in a music course attend regularly and are engaged with their learning. My experiences as a student, teacher and coordinator have taught me that attending classes is crucial for acquiring the essential knowledge embedded within the course. I know that making friends, working collaboratively and enjoying and feeling challenged by study leads to higher satisfaction and a greater chance of academic success. There are also factors that are distinctive to music and creative art practice courses as opposed to non-practice related courses. Music requires a great deal of guided and 'slow learning'. This takes time. A student who does not attend regularly

does not usually have the time required for this kind of learning. Music also requires a great deal of collaborative teaching and learning. Students are expected to be active and consistent members of groups of who prepare and perform music repertoire. Put simply, it's hard to play a funk piece when the drummer and bass player don't show up. This all seems common sense to me. And yet a significant number of students who apply for our music courses do not attend regularly or engage sufficiently with the course. This phenomenon has led, in part, to this doctoral research aimed at exploring and uncovering the reasons why students behave this way.

Entrance to most music courses is via audition and interview. Victoria University employs an audition and interview for both HE and TAFE music courses to gauge applicants' music abilities and suitability for the course. The student is asked to present two contrasting pieces so we can get a pretty clear picture of their level of technical prowess and musicality, their level of experience and the kind of music they are interested in. The interview is a more complex process. We have about 15 minutes to talk to a student and find out what kind of a person they are, what they want to get out of the course and where they want to go both educationally and musically. We ask a variety of questions to elicit this information. Sometimes I feel we get a good idea of the applicant and at other times I think we misread things completely. Or rather I think sometimes there is a disconnect between the person we interviewed and the person who begins the course.

We interview students in order to discern whether they are suited to the course. What we really mean is, do they really want to do the course and will they turn up and be engaged? If the answer is no, then we can help them to avoid an unsuccessful (and unnecessarily expensive) educational experience. We can also ensure that we're not unduly occupied by chasing, cajoling and castigating a group of students who do not want to be there. We can instead spend our time teaching those who are engaged. We want to devote our time and energy to create a positive and fulfilling experience for the significant number of students who do want to be in the course.

The interview process is interesting but also perplexing at times. No student ever tells us that they don't want to come into the course or that they won't put in the

effort required. Many students tell us about their passion for music. In fact it's become a bit of a running joke that when asked why they want to do the course, students will say 'I've always been passionate about music' and expect that this statement explains it all. Of course, it doesn't and it's a fair bet that if that's all they can come up with then they are more likely than not to have not thought out thoroughly why they want to actually study music.

Other students are more articulate. They tell us about the music lessons they had as children, the bands they have been in, the gigs they have done, the church groups they've been a part of, the hours spent playing in suburban bedrooms trying to discover the key to their favourite songs. They then tell us that they want to learn more about music; learn the theory that explains the practice and become professional musicians. Fair enough. This all makes sense.

We have also had a history of accepting a high number of our applicants, albeit ranked in order of preference. This is due to a genuine desire to offer places to those who tell us they want to study with us. We have tended to offer places even if we may not have been entirely convinced of some students' intentions and capacities. There has also been an increasing focus and pressure within the university to attract and retain higher numbers of students. There are various financial imperatives associated with the tertiary education sector involved in this push.

So how do we get from an initial promise of dedication and zeal to nonattendance and lack of engagement? Perhaps some students are telling us what they think we want to hear rather than what they really want to get out of a course. Perhaps some students are not engaged with why they are applying and what they want from a music course. Perhaps some students do not have realistic expectations about the nature and challenges of music education. Perhaps some are being pushed by their parents against their wishes. Or is that we are not applying rigorous enough criteria for entrance to the course? Should we be taking only those we are entirely convinced really want to study with us and have the necessary capacity to thrive and succeed? This could result in accepting fewer students and failing to meet student quotas. Would we be willing to risk the institutional consequences of this?

I think we need to further investigate the interview/audition process, the criteria for entrance and optimum student quotas, in addition to thinking about the quality and nature of the curriculum and pedagogy. It may be that gaining a clearer understanding of the prior music experiences of the music student demographic will assist in improving the way we select students and, in turn, their experiences within the course.

5.2. What's the matter with Gillian?

I first met 'Gillian' when I taught her in a song writing unit in the second year of the course. She sat with two friends in the corner of the class near the piano and when I finished my brief introduction to the subject she raised her hand and asked 'so, what song writing have you done Greg?' I spluttered about, trying to strike a balance between sounding experienced enough to satisfy her that I was qualified to teach the subject but not so much that I might be thought egotistical. I distinctly remember feeling a bit flushed and unsure whether she was satisfied by my answer.

Over the next two years I became aware that Gillian wasn't entirely happy with the course. She dropped by my office at one point and asked whether she could take an arranging subject from another university because the arranging unit she was doing with us was not 'relevant' to her? We had a chat about why she thought the subject was not what she wanted. Gillian said she wanted to arrange her own music but that this unit required her to arrange existing pieces for other instrument groupings. I explained this was about approaches to arranging and she might want to employ some of what she learned to her own compositions. I ended up turning down the request because the unit did not meet our learning outcomes. Gillian just sighed, thanked me for time and slinked off.

At other times I'd see her wandering about, often in the company of other students, but rarely laughing or even smiling as her friends were. Gillian would often ask questions in class, particularly about assessments that implied she thought they were not valuable or relevant. In ensemble classes she was quiet and rarely engaged with decisions about the piece at hand. She would sigh audibly as a decision was made about some aspect of the song but say nothing.

It was as if she was present but not really there. And her performance style and gesture reflected this. Comments about Gillian's performance in recitals usually said something like 'technically adequate, solid phrasing and pitch but lacks expression...'

Gillian had come to music through her involvement with 'praise and worship' ensembles set up and run through her local church community. There were other students from similar denominations studying music at Victoria University and I would sometimes see Gillian with small groups of students out in the courtyard, holding hands and engaging in 'prayer circles'. I wondered whether Gillian was as dissatisfied with the church activities as with her time with us. Or was her church engagement where it was really 'at' for her? Perhaps the music course fared poorly in comparison? I tried to tease out the reasons for Gillian's lack of engagement for the course from time to time. Mostly she would offer a wan smile and say 'no, everything's fine', and then sigh and look to up lost in her own thoughts.

Gillian finished the degree and was, in retrospect, a diligent and able student. But it frustrates me still very much that I was not able to find out why she had not seemed to enjoy her music studies. Why does this frustrate me? Is it because I wanted to help her, to help all students, to engage with the course and get the most out of it that they could? Perhaps I worry that if students aren't really engaged then it's a poor reflection, at least in part, of what we were all trying to do here?

5.3. All that Jazz

All music performance students perform in recitals at the end of each semester as part of the assessment for practical music units. A panel of teachers assesses these recitals. Students tend to find these performances quite stressful due to the public nature of the assessment. They often struggle to choose, rehearse and perform music repertoire that they may not have been familiar with, or even like. Recital week tends to be a festival of anxious faces, nervous laughter, forgotten lyrics, and malfunctioning amps; of sweat and tears, laughter and fear.

‘John’ was a second year diploma music student who had just completed his recital. As the panel broke for lunch I noticed him sitting alone at the back of the performance hall. John was slumped in the chair, head hung low. I went over to him and asked how he felt about his recital. He hesitated before replying. Sucking in air, he replied that he thought he’d played well enough to pass, ‘Maybe with a bit of luck...’ After a moment he added that he was thinking about withdrawing from the course anyway. I suggested a coffee and a chat.

I asked John why he wanted to leave the course. He said that he didn’t think the course was right for him. John told me that he loved ‘progressive rock’ and played regularly in his own band. They’d been practising in his mate’s garage for the last three years, had played at their friends’ parties and had even been offered gigs at the Tote. But John said he’d never done well at school – never got into the ‘whole classroom thing’. This included music. He went on to paint a rather bleak picture of drab fibro portables, filled with bored High School students struggling to rehearse yet another performance of ‘Oklahoma’; Of chaotic percussion workshops with a cacophony of mistimed, angry strikes to the drum. John could never remember which scale had what sharps or flats or all those fancy Italian words that were meant to tell you how to play the music. He’d ended up in the TAFE music course, but really didn’t know why. ‘I love playing music with my band’, he said ‘but music at school, even here, you know maybe isn’t for me. John said that ‘all this theory and Classical and Jazz stuff’ just wasn’t what he was interested in, that he didn’t like the music, found it difficult to practise. It eventually came out that John felt that playing this repertoire didn’t allow him to express how well he could play.

I tried to explain to John that learning ‘all that Jazz’ was an important part of contemporary music education. This was why his teacher recommended different styles and Jazz standards as part of the student repertoire. I explained that learning the theoretical aspects – the melodies, the chords, the fundamental improvisational aspects of all music – were crucial to a well-rounded player. This advice went down as well as an ABBA song at an AC/DC gig. John seemed to slump further down into his chair.

Trying to maintain a positive tone, I added that becoming familiar with varied repertoire and music technique would help him become a better rock guitarist. I

said 'You'll know lots more chords and have more rhythmic and harmonic ideas to use with your music...' John looked dubious. At least he didn't slump further into his chair – a good thing too, otherwise he would have ended up on the floor.

We chatted for a while and it became clear to me that John had some good points. He had enrolled in a contemporary music performance course. He felt Progressive Rock was certainly contemporary but he was not being encouraged to play that style of music. I asked him how he had chosen his repertoire for the recital. He told me that his instrumental and ensemble teachers had selected all his pieces.

'Why not play some of your pieces for the end of year recital, as well as some of the other stuff' I suggested. He sat up. 'Could I do that?' he asked. The subject outlines didn't prohibit alternative repertoire, progressive metal or any other original music - it was merely the convention that music teachers chose, from some students' perspective, more 'traditional' repertoire. Most teachers had graduated from Classical or Jazz institutions themselves. They were teaching what they knew and trusted. I suggested that John talk to his instrumental teacher and suggest some different repertoire approaches.

I sat on the panel for John's end of year recital. He began with a Bach study, moved onto a few Jazz standards and finished with three original pieces, accompanied by his rock band. He sang as well as played guitar. I hadn't even known that he could sing. He played with confidence and obvious pleasure, relishing the opportunity to showcase the music that he called his own. The band ended with a howling, swirling original piece that had them all jumping wildly around the stage. The audience loved it, appreciating the joy and energy in their performance. The panel felt that the recital programme was appropriate and that he had also performed the 'traditional' repertoire with greater technical competence than he had done in the mid-year recital.

John approached me after the recital. He was breathless and beaming. 'That was awesome', he told me. 'You rocked' I replied. He said he felt he had played well, but that he also felt more comfortable up on stage. He told me that maybe all the 'Jazz and other stuff' was helping his playing, and his song writing skills.

John finished his diploma of music a year ago. I received an email from him last week, inviting me to his band's album launch. I've never been a huge fan of Progressive Rock but I think I'll go and give it another try...

5.4. Eat your greens

I teach a subject that explores the role music plays in society and how people perceive and use music in their lives. The subject relies heavily on sociological and cultural frameworks. 'Maria' had attended all the lectures and actively engaged with the class discussion in this unit. She had many original ideas and appeared to enjoy looking at music from perspectives other than the purely aesthetic. However, when it came to writing her final essay, she was really struggling. I had read her initial draft and, although it contained many interesting ideas, it lacked virtually any mention of the major literature in the area. I told her that she needed to read what others had written on her topic, and write what she thought about them. She came to my office a few days before the essay was due. 'I'm going to fail your subject', she said. 'I can't do the essay. I can't find anything about it. I've looked but there's nothing.' When I asked where she had been searching she replied that she had 'Googled' her topic but hadn't come up with anything.

I began to talk about the library. There were shelves of general music texts that might be of assistance to her and I suggested that she also needed to search the databases for relevant journals and articles. I reminded her that the subject outline included some of these sources and authors. My comments drew a blank stare. Through further discussion it became clear that she had never written a formal academic essay. She had no idea how to use the on line library search engines and, indeed, had only visited the campus library once 'to borrow a CD'.

I organized for the Maria to attend a 'research and writing skills' seminar provided by the teaching and learning arm of the university. She seemed keen but didn't turn up to the appointment. On another occasion we visited the library together and searched for relevant material for her essay. We found a lot of useful information but Maria was dismayed at the prospect of having to read it

all. Tears were shed as she realized the seemingly enormous task ahead. There was nothing further to say except that it was hard work.

In the end she gave it a go and handed in the essay. She told me she hadn't liked doing all the reading and found it hard to understand a lot of what was being discussed. She told me it was like eating Brussels sprouts – good for you but tasted horrible. I learned that Maria had come from a local High School and had scraped through VCE with many gaps in her learning. She had enrolled in a music course to play and learn music. She had found herself being asked to meet academic requirements that she had no idea of and to engage with areas of music she had no experience of. I felt really proud of this student – as I do so of many others in her situation.

5.5. Did you hear the one about the drummer?

'Ken' was a drummer who came from an outer western Melbourne. He played several nights a week in a wedding band with his uncle. His interest in drums was fired by accompanying his uncle to gigs as a child, and he had learned to play through watching his uncle's every move. Ken bought his first drum set with money earned from helping load the band's gear and making sure all the players in the band were sufficiently refreshed during sets. He bought drum magazines and read articles by famous drummers who gave expert tips and advice on drumming techniques. He spent endless hours playing along with his favourite music – often with mates with the same music tastes.

Ken could play the drums but he had had no formal music training. He had not studied music at school and had found general academic study uninteresting and a struggle. He said he chose music because his parents wanted him to get a degree and music seemed the natural course for him to study. But it was obvious that Ken was not really into the course from the beginning. He struggled with music theory classes. Ken played by ear and resisted learning and reading music. The formal academic procedures and rules of the university really troubled him. Ken would complain: 'Why do I have to word process my assignments?' 'Why do I have to score the music, can't I just use charts?' 'Can I email you my work – why do I have to put it in the assignment box?' 'Do I really

have to use a cover sheet?’ ‘What do you mean I’m not enrolled in the subject – I’ve been turning up haven’t I?’

When asked to switch off his mobile phone for class Ken argued that he couldn’t in case he got a call for work or a text from the mates in his band. When I asked him why he was using computer room tutorial time for engaging in online ‘chat room’ gossip Ken answered that this was the best time to do it because broadband time at home was limited. Having to leave the drum practice room to attend a composition or theory class was a chore and he routinely turned up late for class, having lost track of time.

Towards the end of his first year of study Ken came to see me. He told me he was thinking of leaving the course. He said he felt disillusioned with the formal nature of the course, all the time spent in classes and not playing. He told me that studying music was not really what he had imagined and that it was too much like school. Whilst I sympathized with his position there was not really much I could say, except that institutions like ours needed rules and processes and that other academic skills and knowledge needed to be learnt to satisfy the course expectations and produce musicians who were ‘qualified’. I felt like an old bore. I think Ken understood but he certainly didn’t like it and he continued to struggle throughout the course. When I think back I get the feeling he really didn’t enjoy his time with us very much at all.

I wonder how he looks back on his time in the music department and how the institutional music experience served him as a musician.

5.6. The DJ

‘Tom’ came to us from Melton and a thriving ‘DJ scene’. This student had enrolled in the music course and wanted to enhance his skills and knowledge of computers and music software. The student earned money ‘Djing’ parties and dance events around his local area and felt he could build the business by learning more about music. His parents also believed a music qualification would help to somehow legitimise what he did and provide a more secure employment future.

The type of events Tom worked at took place on most nights of the week and often went on into the early hours of the morning. Tom routinely arrived late, bleary eyed and enervated from the night's activities. This was hardly an ideal state for learning and the he struggled to concentrate and regularly failed to finish projects. Tom failed many units of study and became increasingly disillusioned with the course. Sunbury doesn't have raves and dance parties – there's just no call for this particular cultural activity – so Tom student couldn't transfer his interests to the place of his studies. All of this eventually led to the end of Tom's time with us.

Tom just couldn't connect with a formal study environment, a place removed from his mates and usual hang-outs and all the activities that went along with them. It's unfortunate that Tom's university experience was unable to accommodate his specific cultural interests as well. Could time spent at university also be an opportunity to foster cultural experiences with like-minded people and activities?

5.7. The party

I got buttonholed at an end of semester celebratory gathering by one of my students. 'Mick' had just finished his final end of year recital and had received his final mark. He blurted out that 'Dave got 97!' I mean, how can you guys give him 97?! I mean, like that's like saying he's close to perfect, you know almost professional. Is that what you're saying? And I got 80?! So I'm 17% less of a player than he is?'

Mick was clearly exasperated. I was surprised by the vehemence and level of frustration – and frankly, a bit annoyed that a pleasant evening had been disrupted by a slightly drunk and complaining student. I got enough of this during the day at work (well, not the drunk bit) but this was supposed to be an easy going 'aren't we all great?' night. I let Mick finish and took a deep breath and a sip of my beer. I tried to explain that there were pretty clear performance criteria that the assessment panel referred to when marking recitals, criteria that Mick and all the other students were referred to frequently throughout the year. Mick: 'yeah but what do they really mean Greg?'

I told Mick that marks were not objective or finite truths about someone's ability but rather a subjective (albeit carefully judged) opinion based on the evidence presented at that particular time. Mick: 'yeah but I prepared really hard and Sonja said that was the best that I'd played and even better than last year when I got 86'. I spoke about the limitations of criteria based referencing, especially in relation to creative arts and artistic works. I talked about scaling within scaffolded curriculum and about moderation within assessment rubrics. Mick: yeah, well...but 97?!!

Finally I said 'Mick, you know, it's not perfect. You're at university doing a course. This course has subjects and we have to give you marks and grades for each subject so the university can give you a piece of paper saying you passed the course. We don't actually have a choice about this, so we do the best we can to make it clear to you why you received the mark you did'. Mick was silent for a moment. He paused and then smiling, said 'yeah, but no mate, you're OK. I mean I know what I stuffed up in my pieces and I guess I'm pretty happy with that mark. It's just, you know, 97..!?' And with that he lightly slapped my arm and walked off to join his mates.

On my way home I thought how weird it must be to be told, in exact percentage terms, what one's playing is worth. Yes, we did do our best to be objective and clear in our assessment but maybe there were better ways. And then I remembered Mick's words about knowing what he'd done wrong with his pieces. Maybe this was the key. We have to tell students what they're 'worth' in terms of marks but if they can learn to accurately and honestly evaluate their own performance and skills then isn't this more valuable to them?

5.8. My (not so) funny valentine

'Melanie' strode to the stage with a beaming smile and confident gait. She took the microphone from the stand and turned to the members of her band 'ready? One, two three, four...'

Melanie's was the last recital performance of the day. I had looked forward to hearing her rendition of 'My Funny Valentine' and then heading home after a long day of critiquing student performances. I looked up from the scores and program notes before me and smiled expectantly, waiting for her to begin. I

waited...and waited. There were a few coughs from the small audience assembled. The drummer whispered something to Melanie I didn't catch. The other band members stood on the stage looking at their feet. Melanie looked down, then up, first to the guitarist on her left and then out to the audience. She looked terrified, eyes bulging and with a fixed downturned frown.

The drummer whispered to Melanie again and this time he intoned 'one, two, three, four' and the band started the soft but recognisable shuffle of the piece. Melanie missed the first entrance but the band kept on. The second time around she came in but with a muted and cracked voice 'My funny valentine, sweet funny valentine'. Melanie still had a stunned and frozen expression as she started straight ahead into the audience. It was like she was not there, up on stage, singing. Words were coming out but only as rasped whispers. My heart went out to her.

The guitarist took his solo and the band prepared for another verse. As she was just about to launch in, Melanie clutched her stomach, shrieked and started running off stage. One of the panellists leapt to his feet and grabbed the empty bin at the foot of the stage and managed to get it to Melanie just as she began to throw up. The teacher put his arm around for her support and helped her out the door to the fresh air.

Later, after Melanie had recovered somewhat, we had a word with her. Although we both knew she was prone to 'nerves', as were many students, we had no idea that she suffered from chronic performance anxiety. She told us that the condition had become worse as the course had gone on and that she was currently seeking medical advice for anxiety. Melanie was particularly worried that her inability to complete the recital would mean that she would fail the subject. I assured her that now we knew there was a problem we could all work something out together.

There's a great deal of talk about 'nerves' and the role they play in music performance. It's often said that nerves are a way of knowing you care about your performance and of raising energy levels. This is often used as a way of mitigating the physical state that manifests for many performers. However when

the performer is unable to perform at all, to show their skills and talent, then it is clearly more than 'just nerves'.

Melanie's performance anxiety had obviously reached extreme lengths but when I reflect over the many years of assessing and attending student performances it's clear a great number of students suffered from varying degrees of performance anxiety. How many times had the assessment panel commented that a particular student had not performed the piece as well as they had in rehearsal or in the lesson? How many students looked clearly uncomfortable or even out of place on stage? How many students clearly hated having to get up on stage and perform?

And yet performing in public is, and always has been, a cornerstone of music courses, including ours. Included in the criteria for assessment is the phrase 'perform repertoire with confidence'. It's almost as though preparation and knowledge of the piece might be the only aspects that contribute to the ability of a performer to 'perform repertoire with confidence'. I think we have always assumed that students can be nervous but just have to learn to deal with it. It may be that some of us thought that 'confidence' was a natural skill that some possessed and others did not. Instrumental teachers try to assist students with performance anxiety, through various methods and with varying levels of success. However, the curriculum and pedagogy do not often specifically address performance anxiety.

Perhaps this is the way it had always been. I certainly don't remember receiving any instruction or advice as a performer in the various choirs I participated in as a boy – even though I can remember feeling so nervous I thought I was going to wet myself! I can clearly remember my final VCE performance exam and shaking so badly I could hardly hold the bow let alone manoeuvre it confidently over the strings. I was so nervous at one of my gigs that I forgot to plug my guitar in and strummed silently as the band went on without me. And so it always was, but should it always be, this way? And if not, how would we go about 'teaching' about performance anxiety and the approaches to manage it?

5.9. I just don't get it

In my role as coordinator I often meet with students who come to express particular issues with subjects and/or teachers. We have always encouraged students to communicate openly with us about any issues or problems they have for the simple reason that we cannot begin to help unless we know what the problem is in the first place.

I had many meetings with students over a number of years about second and third year composition subjects. Composition 2 was aimed at orthodox and more traditional approaches to composition and Composition 3 was aimed at more modernist and postmodernist approaches to composition. Both subjects were designed to teach students about techniques and styles of composition. Every year at least four or five students would come to me complaining about the content and teaching style of these subjects. These students were reluctant to learn about different compositional styles and approaches, particularly in the context of historical and aesthetic considerations. Students found much of the material 'irrelevant' and 'boring'. Students were often actively antithetic about having to listen to examples of music that was challenging or removed from styles that usually listened to or had heard before. A Stockhausen or Cage piece produced either glazed expressions or bemused and unsubstantiated criticism, 'wanky' was how one student described this music.

Both composition units were taught by a passionate and gentle natured teacher with extensive experience in 20th century and postmodern composition. The teacher had an active and well regarded career as a composer and strived to link his own artistic practice with the compositional theory of the classroom. However, students complained the teacher was 'out of touch' with what they wanted and needed to learn. Students argued that the language used was too complex and that they did not really understand what he was 'on about' much of the time. This was not the reaction of all students but there were enough similar comments over a sustained period of time for me to conclude that this was becoming a significant issue within the music course.

What some students seemed to want from these subjects was the space and guidance for them to create music that they were interested in. One student

might be in a 'metal' band and want to write songs for his band. Another student might see herself as a singer songwriter wanting to develop her repertoire of ballads. These students wanted tips and tools to help them with their specific musical aims and ambitions. Above all they wanted everything in the classroom to be practical. They did not want, nor did they see the relevance in, in learning about why and how music 'worked' in a compositional context. They just wanted to 'do'.

I saw my role as trying to explain to the students the value of the subject and the way it was taught to their overall music education and their future as musicians. I elaborated upon points made by the teacher, pointed to the importance of both practical and theoretical approaches to music and strived to explain the relevance of the subject to the curriculum. I empathised with students about the challenges of some of the subject matter. I also acknowledged that I could see how the teacher could rush ahead at times, particularly given his vast experience and familiarity with the subject. I think I understood that students sometime felt there was too wide a gap in the relative levels of enthusiasm and understanding of the subject. I was concerned that despite the teacher's obvious expertise in the subject, he may not have been able to adequately to communicate the knowledge.

Other subjects explored music from historical, sociological, political and aesthetic perspectives. As music teachers we had always felt that music graduates should be not only musically proficient but also able to understand and articulate the place and importance of music in the worlds in which they lived. These subjects tended also to focus on the teaching of academic skills like research, critical reflection and effective writing. We had always felt that these skills were important undergraduate attributes (regardless of the specific discipline focus) and that they were a crucial part of music graduates' skill set in competing and thriving in the arts and culture industries. We believed universities had (and indeed still have) an imperative to help students to develop the ability to think and clearly express ideas in a mature and considered way.

There were similar reactions to these 'academic' units as with the composition units. Students would consistently question the relevance of the subjects to their

course and career. They could not possibly ever have to use Harvard referencing as a musician? They would surely never even have to write an essay again? Some students complained about having to analyse music and reflect upon music in wider contexts. Students often complained that having to analyse music 'destroyed' the 'magic' of the music. Students complained to me that they should not have to understand why or how music worked and functioned but rather just enjoy it. The phrase 'I know what I like, why is it so important to understand why I like it?!' became a constant refrain.

In the many meetings I had with students about these subjects I tried to listen to the students' feedback and discuss the issues raised. My approach was to try and acknowledge concerns, explain why we do what we do and try and find a way forward for the students. Sometimes students appeared to feel better when I explained more specifically the place of a particular subject in the syllabus or the reasons why we take a particular approach in a subject. Sometimes they seemed to understand that the particular subject is important even if they were challenged by the subject or the way it was taught. Other times students left my office with sighs and shaking of heads.

At times I feel acutely aware of the power imbalance between the designers and teachers of curriculum and those who study the curriculum. Students with sufficient motivation and confidence have the right to voice concerns. But students can rarely play a role in changing the curriculum or the way it's taught. If a student doesn't appreciate the value of a subject or thinks a subject is irrelevant there is really nothing they can do but lump it because they have to complete it in order to pass the course. It's my job, all teachers' job, to teach their subjects in such a way so that students are stimulated in their learning and understand why that subject is a part of the course. If there is sustained negative feedback we may have to acknowledge that we are either not doing our job well enough (or need to try something different) or the subject may just not be as important or relevant as we may have thought.

5.10. It's a long road

Many of the students struggle with the distances between their home communities and the university campus. When the music department was

located at the Sunbury campus I made the 40 minutes' drive most days and whilst I'm not particularly fond of commuting to an outer campus it's nothing compared to the journey that many of our students need to make.

I think back of one student who left home in Brighton at 7.30am to arrive at Sunbury by 10am. 'Mai' caught two trains and two buses and then often had to make the 30 minutes uphill walk to the campus as there were only infrequent connecting buses up to the campus. I saw her sometimes as I arrived, a diminutive figure carrying a back pack stuffed with text books and music scores almost as big as her, flushed cheeks puffing as she arrived at the music building. After this arduous journey she began her day of study and at the end of the day she made the long journey home once again. I wonder how she did it and whether she had any time at all for extra-curricular activities.

This is not an uncommon story – our students come from all over Melbourne to study with us. Some students drive themselves, some carpool and a few even manage to catch a lift with teachers that may live nearby. Students occasionally miss days at university because they don't have enough money for petrol. Others rely on the often-unreliable public transport, with students arriving after classes have started, in dribs and drabs, with tales of changed timetables and cancelled services.

5.11. The student lounge

Our new purpose built music building at Sunbury had been completed and we were all busy planning what would go where and which rooms would house which subjects and equipment. As I walked to the staff meeting a group of students were huddled together underneath the front porch of the building, munching on sandwiches and buckets of chips. We exchanged greetings and comments about the (very cold and wet) weather. At the staff meeting I suggested we use one of the larger rooms as a 'student lounge' where students could congregate, eat, chat and listen to music. I argued that as well as getting students out of the rain it might help foster more of a community feel in the course. Other staff thought it was a good idea and we set about making it happen.

Universities are large and leviathan institutions and perhaps as seasoned campaigners we ought to have realised that something as seemingly straightforward as a student lounge might not be that easy to arrange. First there were OHS issues to contend with. Then the facilities department found a number of 'hurdles' that needed to be overcome. Financial bucks were passed around endlessly as the relatively small sums of money could not be found. But establishing the student lounge became a campaign for me. We enlisted active student support and together we learned about advocacy, pleading and, in the end, secrecy. We had all planned that the student lounge would have a functioning kitchen and other amenities to make it a welcoming and useful place for students to spend time. In the end we settled for a lounge without kitchen facilities simply because the OHS hurdles and finances were just too daunting. We had a fund raiser and staff and students brought pre-loved items from home to furnish the space. Lee brought a toaster and Kay provided a sandwich maker. Penny even managed a microwave oven. The money allowed us to buy a few couches and chairs and some lovely indoor plants. One teacher donated an old stereo system and students bought in old records and CD's. Band and movie posters completed the space.

We held a small opening ceremony and everyone seemed delighted with the results. In the weeks that followed I relished walking past the room and seeing students laughing, eating and chatting. Later I received a knock at my office door. Two students were standing there, one holding a plate of great looking (and even better smelling) cheese and spinach pie. 'We thought you'd like some lunch' they said. I asked how the lounge was going and they both replied everyone thought it was great.

We did have to be careful with building plans to label the student lounge as a 'meeting room' to avoid unwanted scrutiny from the powers that be. And we had to come down hard at times about the level of cleanliness. But lobbying, furtive planning and dirty dishes were all worth it and the lounge really seemed to give the building a lift.

5.12. Above and beyond

KJ and I had finished assessing the student recitals for another semester. We were having a cup of tea in the staff kitchen and I was telling KJ about how we were going to have to reconstitute the music degree due to a university wide restructure related to credit points and accreditation. The university wide restructure mandated reductions to the number of units and the hours of delivery. I was interested in KJ's feedback on some ideas I had. KJ had some great suggestions and also offered to help with the re-write of some of the units, particularly those he had been teaching for several years. I explained that, as usual, the budget was tight and that the remuneration would be limited. And, as usual, KJ said 'no worries' with his customary toothy grin; we'd been around that particular dance floor before...

The course re-write took weeks and weeks of painstaking work from many staff members. As the deadline for submission drew near KJ spent several evenings at my house helping me cut, paste, nudge and force the square pegs of music curriculum into the round holes of the accreditation. One of the big problems we had was how to condense three important curriculum areas into the one unit we had designated in the new course structure. Aural studies, stylistic analysis and music theory needed to become one combined 'music materials' unit. We had to find a way to include what had been six hours a week of delivery into three, without drastically compromising the learning outcomes for students. It occurred to me that not only was KJ assisting in this complex process but was also willingly participating in an overall reduction of sessional teaching hours.

Finally finished, I submitted the course for the necessary administrative approvals process and we all crossed out fingers. It was close to Christmas and we raised our glasses at the annual end of year music department drinks. Then we all went off for our few weeks break.

When I returned from leave I began the usual process of staffing delivery of the course. KJ was happy to take the new 'music materials' unit and, again as usual, had a number of good ideas about how the unit could be taught. He worked with me to prepare the unit guides and tirelessly assembled the huge

amount of resources and materials required for the subject. All this this work took place before semester began and his contract had been signed.

The semester started and whilst I was confident that we had all done a pretty thorough job of preparing the new course for delivery I knew there would be some hiccups. And there were. One was that the 'music materials' unit was presenting a real challenge for both KJ and the students. Several students were falling behind, even early in the semester, due to the sheer pace at which the large volume of information needed to be covered. I had a steady stream of students through my office complaining about the changes. I listened to their concerns and I did my best to outline the circumstances that had led to the situation we were now in. Most of the students were mature enough to understand the position but I think we all realised that this did nothing to really assist them through the challenges.

A few weeks went by and by mid semester things had calmed down a bit. I ran into Danny, a student taking the 'music materials' unit. 'How are things?' I enquired optimistically. 'Much better' Danny replied 'now that KJ is running the extra tutorial'. I did a double take and asked what he meant. It transpired that from week three of the semester KJ had been running an extra one and a half hour tutorial for the 'music materials' unit for students who felt they were struggling. Apparently two thirds of the class were attending and all but two students were now passing. I hadn't approved extra hours; KJ was doing the tutorial 'gratis'. I gave KJ a call later that day. I thanked him and marvelled at the turn around in student progress but added that the learning issues brought about through restructure were not his responsibility and he was in no way expected to do this unpaid work. He told me 'Greg, I really don't mind. The students need it and I've got the time. I get paid well for what I'm doing anyway. And I enjoy it. The students are doing really well.'

We worked over the semester break and found money to fund an extra tutorial for the following semester. But I felt so grateful for KJ's efforts and his pastoral and academic care of the students. My journal at the time recorded these events and also included some short hand comments about all the other extra efforts that KJ and many of the other sessional staff did for the music courses and students: Hours and hours of unpaid work, including attending meetings

and engaging with students before and after scheduled hours of work; Undertaking work at the final hour because student numbers changed just as semester was starting; putting up with unfair and inexplicable administrative requirements imposed by senior university management, without complaint; striving to be part of teaching team despite the dearth of general support in the sessional teacher role at the university; taking struggling students under their wing; shielding me from 'trivial' matters, because they were capable and common sensed enough to solve the situation; sharing the amazing experiences and knowledge of their work in the music industry and even recommending students for paid work; taking pride in their ability to really engage students and caring about the student experience studying music at Victoria University. 'Above and beyond' seems an apt description. Thanks KJ.

5.13. The juggler

Teachers are required to balance a number of roles in their jobs. But the term 'balance' seems wholly inappropriate as it implies there is actually some balance between all the roles that a music academic must play, and play well. From where I sit, typing (far too slowly and at times clumsily) I don't so much see 'balance' but, rather, a cart of apples upset all over the grounds of the university. Actually I picture these roles as the juggling balls that must be kept in the air but have, one by one, fallen to the stage. I'm left standing there in front of the audience, red faced and out of breath with no tricks left.

I empathise with Pelias' (2003, p. 369) observation that 'students just keep coming...' and no matter my good intentions I'm so busy teaching students, caring for and about them, counselling, guiding and becoming infuriated with them, that I sometimes (or often?) prepare less than I should, teach less than I should, read less than I should and think less than I could. And of course the university always wants more and more students because we all know that students equate to money and that money pays our salaries. So we can't grumble really, and anyway shouldn't everyone deserve a tertiary education? But it's more than just getting all these students through the door. We have to make sure they stay so they keep using their student dollars at our university, not that other one (with a fancier logo and better catch cry - you know they've

now got whole trams advertising how great they are?). And anyway I want the students to stay because I really do care about them and I really do want them to have an enjoyable and effective education. At night sometimes when I can't sleep I wonder how the students will think about their time at university. I want them very much to be able to look back and smile and think how valuable and worthwhile the whole experience was...and then I really can't sleep.

And after too little sleep and too little thinking, preparing and reading for teaching I am required to give my service to the university – the monolithic institution that hired me, pays me and to whom I should be eternally grateful to for paying me to do what I (at times at least) confess to love. 'And you do want to do your share, because it just wouldn't seem right to say no...' (Pelias, 2003, p. 370) but all those hours in committee meetings takes me away from the teaching (that I don't have enough time for anyway) and even though sometimes I think I can make a difference to the 'strategic direction' of the university or make a bad policy slightly less bad, mostly I know the decisions will be made by people who earn far more than I do (and who therefore must be far more qualified to make the decisions). I end up wondering why I need to be there, giving service, in the first place – especially when I have other things I could be doing, like reading, thinking or teaching students.

And after all the teaching and servicing I am supposed to be engaged in research. There are projects to do, data to collect and endless applications for money to do research, obtain approval to do research, analyse data, write up data and get the data out. The amount of research output, the physical quantity that I can contribute to the combined output of the university, determines my worth to the university. But after all the teaching and servicing I'm pretty tired. And I'm also lacking confidence in my abilities to 'output' any quantity of qualitative or quantitative research because I don't feel I have learned enough about being a researcher because I've been learning to be a researcher while learning to be a teacher and there's just too much to learn really. Again I'm reminded of Pelias (2003, p. 371) who worried that research 'is supposed to look a certain way and you know that this paper isn't one of the ways because you don't have any quotes'. Although this story does have quotes but it's from the same author...

But then I think ‘well hang on, I’m here writing this as part of my research and it’s sort of OK isn’t it? And last week I chaired a curriculum meeting that decided some important points for developing subjects and I also gave that class on gender and music where one of my students came up and said that she thought she might do her final essay on that topic because she thought my lecture was ‘interesting’. I think ‘well maybe I do have some sense of balance and maybe I am keeping the balls in the air’. Then I look at my diary for the week and realise that I haven’t learned to juggle more than three balls and while I’m fretting about that I drop one of the three I do have in the air and the others come tumbling down. And there I am again, red faced and out of breath with no tricks left.

Chapter 5 **Let me you tell you a story: music education vignettes** presents the vignettes as data, as is presented in chapters 3 and 4. I made the specific and deliberate choice not to discuss the themes, but rather let the voices (mine and the students) speak as stories to the reader - at this point. Extensive discussion of the key themes presented via the vignettes in Chapter 5 is undertaken in Chapter 7 **Tension: challenges in negotiating tertiary music education** and Chapter 8 **Release: successful negotiations and disruptions in tertiary music education**. The next Chapter, 6 **Home is where the (musical) heart is: music backgrounds** introduces key themes for discussion and particularly explores the data from participant backgrounds presented in Chapter 3 in the context of these themes.

Chapter 6. **Home is where the (musical) heart is: music backgrounds**

6.1. Prelude

‘Raindrop’

[‘24 preludes, opus 28 no. 15 in d-flat major’, Fredric Chopin](#)

This chapter discusses the music backgrounds of the students in this research. The four main fields of data presented in Chapter 3 (home, organised and casual music communities, religious communities and school music communities) are explored. I use Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘cultural capital’ to frame the discussion of participant lifestyle, choices and accrual and possession of ‘knowledge’. Educational and musicological perspectives are explored in relation to the data. Comparisons are made and conclusions drawn concerning challenges, choices, power and learning in the negotiation of these fields. Concluding remarks address the limitations of exclusive applications and strict adherences to specific epistemological frameworks.

Participant observations of High School music learning were recorded during, or following, their involvement with tertiary (institutional) music education, allowing for a close comparative analysis of the learning in both contexts. School music programs failing to adequately prepare students for the demands of tertiary music education were viewed negatively in terms of the accrual of music knowledge. These perspectives demonstrated the challenges brought about by the institutions’ inability to assist students to successfully reproduce the knowledge required by ‘higher’ learning environments such as universities. However, Bourdieu (1986) was highly critical of this drive towards derivation and exclusion in formal education. He may have taken some solace in the somewhat paradoxical outcome for students who, whilst failing to accrue legitimate cultural (music) capital, were nonetheless able to derive positive, or release, experiences in these fields and maintain a level of agency and autonomy of habitus.

6.2. Analytical lenses

'Darkness creates the illusion

That pale day can teach you to see'

'Surprised ice'

Kings of Convenience

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) concepts of habitus, field and cultural capital, and particularly as they relate to educational experiences, assist in framing participant experiences. For the purposes of this discussion 'habitus' refers to the backgrounds, experiences, choices and actions of participants. 'Fields' are the spaces and places where music experiences played out: in homes and within families; in organised and casual music communities; in religious communities and in; High Schools and High School music departments. 'Cultural capital' denotes the level (and the perceived or relative *value*) of music knowledge possessed and accrued by participants in these fields.

Analysis of the research data aligns participant backgrounds and experiences with Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus within the pre-tertiary fields students inhabited. Participant stories entailed notions of anxiety, disappointment and resentment that arguably stemmed from limitations on the power to negotiate societal and educational contexts (fields) brought about by differences between what participants do (habitus) and their relative levels of knowledge (cultural capital). Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) frameworks of cultural and social production and reproduction might appear to 'lock' individuals into unbreakable patterns by placing finite limits on autonomy and outcome, regardless of the actions of individual agents. However, participant narratives were rich with notions of belonging, identity formation, enjoyment, resilience and growth – themes suggesting individuals were able to challenge limitations on agency imposed through the rules governing choice and behaviour.

A cultural reproduction paradigm lens tended to produce 'deficit' discussion points for the participants in this research. The challenges participants experienced, such as lack of engagement, disillusionment, powerlessness,

frustration, anxiety and confusion were arguably brought about by the backgrounds/habitus they negotiated these fields with. Challenges may also have been associated with often limited levels of cultural capital and constraints (rules) within the various social and educational fields they were negotiating. Struggle appeared inextricably linked to the constraints on personal agency dictated by hierarchical structures operating within the various fields.

The stories of participants in this research were undoubtedly complex. The various fields where experiences played out were fluid, ever changing and involved interwoven learning and being contexts. Their narratives were illustrative of the 'messiness of everyday problems' in music and education fields that defy 'technical rationality' (Myers, 2008, p. 7) or straightforward or simplistic analysis. Thus, whilst Bourdieu (1977, 1986) provides a valuable framework for discussing this data, it need not be the only or dominant, narrative analysis. There are epistemological limitations on this or any lens of analysis and it is crucial that individual voices that sang of both struggle *and* success of the participants are clearly heard in wider discussions. There is a need, from time to time, to shift the focus to evince other perspectives and outcomes.

A cultural reproduction framework provides important insights into the often complex and contrasting experiences of young people growing up with, and learning, music prior to tertiary study. The origins of, and constraints to, habitus and the challenges of building individual music (cultural) capital - in terms of limited capital and to the concomitant effects of reduced agency - assist in understanding the basis of participant challenges in negotiating music community and music education fields.

Challenges manifested as anxiety, disillusionment, disassociation, frustration and powerlessness, or even hopelessness. The various tensions participants faced in pre-tertiary music education can be attributed to struggles in understanding, fitting into, belonging to the 'universe of works of art and its history' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 36). This universe is constituted by the various loci of formal learning that participants have experienced – school music programs, the AMEB and VCE music exams, and the assessments, recitals and exams in the music programs. Further definition might include any and every exposure to

(musical) works of art such as music recordings and performances constituting the canon of (musical) artistic works regarded as the highest, best or most valuable examples of human artistic skills and creativity.

Bourdieu (1986) argued that this 'universe' is created and maintained by those who determine (and then present, as inviolable truth) the parts of what we do (habitus) as legitimate and, therefore valuable (in terms of the relative cultural capital accrued). The ability to determine the particular worth of cultural action necessarily produces power in the form of cultural capital. The dominant players in various fields: political leaders in society; captains of industry in the economy; spiritual leaders in religious contexts; leading researchers in academic disciplines; revered critics in artistic areas; and senior administrators within organisations and institutional environments are all representative of the dominant members in societal hierarchies.

Belonging to various social fields that combine to construct this universe necessarily involves understanding what is taught to be right, true or legitimate (Bourdieu 1977) and the way in which it is to be taught. Participants struggled to 'fit in' because membership rested on identifying and understanding the *form* of work (musical/cultural artefact) as opposed to 'merely' experiencing the *function* of musical/cultural products and pursuits. The complete comprehension of form rests upon close reference to the history of all universal works; the comparison of the process and nature of creativity of one work compared with all other work. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 45) described this as 'the play of cultured allusions and analogies endlessly pointing to other analogies'. Those with limited or no prior access to these works, or to education about how such works must be understood, became excluded from music knowledge acquisition. In other words, for those whose habitus (choices and preferences) were different from those considered to be more or the most legitimate, understanding was elusive, resulting in potentially endless tension, anxiety and a sense of exclusion. There was potential for my participants to believe that they would never have sufficient cultural capital (knowledge) to understand and successfully 'play' in the particular fields in which they found themselves in. It would have been tempting for young people to feel powerless to affect change within these paradigms.

However, participant experiences in community fields elicited some contrasting perspectives in terms of habitus and cultural capital. Musical activity in various social fields such as bands, community choirs and orchestras and dance and theatre groups were filled with a sense of joy and love for music. Participants felt they belonged in these places and were buoyed by the companionship of fellow members. These communities were like being 'in one big family'. It is notable that participants rarely mentioned 'anxiety' when describing their community music experiences. In fact the references to anxiety occurred when participants recounted school music experiences, or in a few cases, experiences associated with organised religious organisations.

Clearly, significant differences were evident between community on one hand and institution on the other. Fields containing the social characteristics of communities were collective and collaborative in nature and involved heightened levels of belonging. People chose to participate rather than being directed. Community fields engaged in contested and changing, but ultimately shared, understandings of 'value'. These fields tended to be defined widely and were generally less hierarchically structured and organised. In contrast, institutional fields were defined, organised and hierarchical. The antithetical characteristics of the fields necessarily involved different levels of autonomy and inclusion. The balance between the role of function and form in learning and doing fluctuated between the two fields - as did the notions of informal and formal learning. All these differences resulted in shifting definitions and value of the student habitus and the ability to acquire and maintain differing levels of social and personal capital.

Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) (1986) theoretical positions help to explain tensions and anxiety but also hints at how challenges might be overcome. Anxiety can be seen as inextricably linked to the level of agency within a given context or field. The young people in this study actively sought out and engaged in casual music experiences and seemed to revel in the free spirited nature of these activities. A high level of informal or incidental learning and growth also occurred within these contexts. Participants asserted agency in the choices they made about the music they engaged with and actively sought these contexts out as learning experiences tailored to the types of knowledge and activity they were interested

in. These experiences were both enjoyable and mostly devoid of anxiety. Conversely, participants reported higher levels of stress and frustration with more formal learning fields, such as school music programs, where participation was often not voluntary. In such contexts participant's agency (and habitus) was either limited or curtailed by formalistic characteristics of institutional or organisational structures.

Tilting the cultural reproduction lens produces a different, or wider, perspective of 'capital'. For whilst there is undoubtedly an energetic trade in 'legitimate' cultural capital, young people here evinced the power to value their *own* cultural capital and habitus. Simply, when participants had the power to choose the game and the way it was played, they enjoyed it more. Agency fostered an autonomous sense of belonging, that notion of 'fitting in', and investment in one's own knowledge capital. A strict adherence to Bourdieu's frameworks is as ultimately limiting as narrow constitutions and definitions of 'legitimate' knowledge. I'd like to posit that acknowledging and (re)valuing *personal* agency, in contrast to the exclusive recognition of cultural capital (*social* agency acting as power within society), reconceptualises how my participants negotiated fields, particularly in the contests for power, position and status. The rules underpinning the structuring and structured habitus of the participants can, in this way, be restated. Cultural capital can be more flexibly reinterpreted to include the notion of personal agency. Agents 'disrupted' the rules governing their habitus (lifestyle) through increased individual agency. The identification and definition of notions of power in the social field(s) can include an assessment of the notion of personal agency and well-being. The process of how knowledge and cultural practice is made legitimate thus becomes open for discussion.

Clearly, young people *were* able to *disrupt* the sociological constraints and work towards a way out of Bourdieu's framework, perhaps contradicting the seeming certainty of his insistence that 'there is no way out of the game of culture' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 4). Perhaps young people were beginning to see that the 'game of culture' was not as attractive, or important, as it might have been presented? Perhaps young people were beginning to conceptualise, define and value their own playing fields? A comparison of the levels of agency and

learning in various community and institutional fields detailed the merits and challenges of different ways of being and doing. The greatest challenges were evident when levels of 'personal agency' and 'social agency' became unbalanced. Disruption of Bourdieu's dialectic may be made possible through the identification and construction of a middle ground, or balance, between the attainment of cultural capital (resulting in social agency) and individual capital (acting as personal agency).

6.2.1. Limitations of a cultural theory lens and the distinctiveness of this research

Bourdieu's (1986) study of cultural consumption made within the different strata of French society can be differentiated from the context of my thesis data in important ways. Bourdieu, incredibly, attempted to investigate and theorise upon the cultural (and educational, political and socioeconomic) strata and activities of the entirety of 1960's France. I have explored the music backgrounds and educational experiences of a small group of students in 21st century west of Melbourne. Bourdieu's (1986) research took place before the impact of a globalised technological communications framework on the composition of and changes to socioeconomic classes. Current technological and communication tools arguably offer the possibilities of individuals within various cultural fields to challenge normative paradigms of cultural capital. A global, digitally interconnected society allows for the potential of a giddy complexity of definitions and valuations of cultural capital whilst simultaneously extending possibilities for the development and acceptance of notions of habitus. Due to largely unfettered access to the production, reception and distribution of information (knowledge, cultural capital) individuals are now better placed to challenge previously rigid notions of class and socioeconomic status than at any time in history (Bloustien, 2007). These are the field conditions my participants were negotiating, a very different landscape indeed to the agricultural and urban landscapes explored in 'Distinction' (Bourdieu, 1986)

Despite the now widespread use and acceptance of the central tenets and nomenclature of Bourdieu's theories, there is a history of critique that should be

acknowledged in discussing the value of this theoretical approach (for example Bennett and Silva, 2011, Moore, 2012). I also acknowledge that other cultural theorists such as Barthes, Goffman, Attali or Foucault may well have offered relevant and applicable ways of discussing the cultural experience of my participants in social and artistic spaces. Social and economic scholars such as Marx and Weber might have assisted with analysing the ways that social power and place of participants are established and preserved. As the stories elicited from this research take place in various education contexts it would have been relevant to utilise education theory espoused through such proponents as Dewey and Eisner to understand the experiences of participants.

However the voices of the participants in this investigation really began to sing when I first read 'Distinction'. Bourdieu argued that through the complex connection between habitus, field and cultural capital, knowledge is always contested and those who both possess and control the process of valuation and legitimisation of knowledge 'the holders of titles of cultural nobility' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 15), hold the most power. My student stories revolved so much around notions of agency – of having, not having, wanting, losing, power and the effect that this interplay has on experiences generally. There have been always hierarchies of power at play in the field(s) which constitute the basis for this investigation. Indeed, other studies have explored music and music education experiences through the lens of Bourdieu's cultural reproduction framework (see for example, (Moore, 2012, Azaola, 2012).

There have been many studies into the prior experiences of music students (see for example (Burt and Mills, 2006, Burt et al., 2007, Green, 2005, Green, 2008a, Pitts, 2004, Pitts, 2007, Pitts, 2003) and into experience of students in tertiary music institutions (see for example Feichas, 2010, Faubel et al., 2009). These discussions provide invaluable contributions to further understanding experiences in music and music education and, indeed, provide a relevance to this investigation's data and discussion.

6.3. Development of habitus and the accrual of music capital

*'Our house it has a crowd
There's always something happening
And it's usually quite loud'*

['Our House', Madness](#)

Recollections of music experiences in the home and family were characterised by a sense of enjoyment and exploration. Participants relished a natural interest in musical sounds and styles. They actively sought out music and appreciated the wonder and 'beauty' of music from an early age. Cora's family held sing along sessions. Ska music wafted through Gordon's family home. Household instruments such as pianos and guitars provided opportunities for music exploration and experimentation. Stereos blared in childhood bedrooms and provided opportunities for the discovery of music tastes and styles.

Early music experiences were of joyous fun. Music was 'pure' and for pleasure. Young voices sang along to favourite pop artists and happily hummed along to familiar tunes on the car radio as the family station wagon wended the way to summer holiday destinations. Voices sang along together at concerts and gigs. Parents drove to lessons and paid for tuition as their children became more interested in music. Friends shared new music with one another. Music spoke to young people forming values, characteristics and meanings as they shaped an autonomous and distinctive identity. Stories of early music experiences were rich in volume, tone and colour. These experiences were similar to all children who 'have the capacity to be musical'(Lamont, 2011).

The early experiences of participants appeared *unadulterated* by the societal expectations and cultural proscriptions of music choice and appreciation. As children, they were 'here to enjoy themselves' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 25). Music involvement was based on a personal, naive sense of taste rather than a consideration or awareness of how music *should* be appreciated or understood. Childhood music tastes, in the Bourdieuan sense, were understood in personal rather than culturally mediated and conditioned terms. Early music preference appeared to involve no notion of value.

Music exploration and enjoyment, though, was coloured by the sounds and shapes of music within the family/home context. Participants overwhelmingly considered they had come from 'musical families' and homes. Parents' music tastes generated the first organised sounds that participants heard. Participants experimented with their parents' now un-used guitars, pianos and other instruments lying around the family house. Many parents encouraged their children to engage with music. Cora's grandfather bought her a portable keyboard when she was six years old and her mother shone with pride as she played the national anthem at gatherings to extended family and friends.

Participants chose to 'teach' themselves by playing along to favourite music, reading music magazines, hunting down music charts and playing and talking about music with friends. Some were actively encouraged by their parents to learn music more formally. Effie's parents engaged a violin teacher for her and drove her to and from lessons for many years. Kyrie's parents believed that a formal music education positively influenced personal and educational development and directed Kyrie and his brothers to take private music lessons. Later, they would move the family into the zone of a local High School which had a reputation for high quality music education. By his own admission, Kyrie did the 'bare minimum' of practice and was 'not really interested' in (formal) music lessons. However, Kyrie reflected that he had been fortunate to have parents who appreciated the importance of music and music education.

Conversely, Belinda bemoaned her parents' refusal to organise piano lessons for her as a young child. She felt that her parents did not appreciate the value of music. Although Djava's father understood his daughter's desire to learn guitar, the family budget could not stretch to private lessons. These experiences highlighted the role domestic environments played in providing different levels of cultural (music) capital for participants. Djava and Belinda possessed less music knowledge as children than those like Kyrie and Iggy who were exposed to a wider experience and *appreciation* of music styles and knowledge.

6.3.1. Conditioned agency and the process of legitimisation

Although first encounters with music involved music exploration and engagement, it is clear that experiences were influenced by the sound and

nature of domestic environments. While some choice was exercised in music investigation, activities were shaped and *limited* by familial backgrounds, interests and values. Music agency was conditioned by the domestic and parental context.

Participants appreciated the function music could play in their early lives. However, early music experiences served as the first locations for the process of legitimisation of music and musical styles, or 'the cultural capital inherited from the family' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 14). Children experienced here the first establishment of exposure to *legitimate* art (music) forms – those styles and genres of music that constituted 'appropriate' music.

Domestic fields contributed to both the appreciation of music per se and to the style and nature of the music. Young people became aware that some styles of music might be seen as more valuable than others. Parents tended to 'approve' of some genres of music over others. Andrew's parents were initially critical of his music choices because Heavy Metal represented a loud and disruptive challenge to quieter and more 'melodious' mainstream music. Kyrie learned that classical piano tuition was a more worthwhile pursuit than 'mucking about' on the guitar. Young people exploring the use (or function) of music began to understand that what music *meant* and how it sounded also mattered. Growing awareness of musical structures and values constituted the beginnings of 'displacing the interest from the content...to the form' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 26). Kyrie's experiences were indicative of an early awareness of the relative value of *learning*, as opposed to merely playing the formulaic aspects of music and of the high(er) cultural value of Classical music.

As young people accrued cultural capital, in the form of legitimate music knowledge, their personal music choices and dispositions (*habitus*) and became conditioned and constrained. This mediation in music agency represented some of the first challenges participants faced in the negotiation of future social and music fields.

6.4. Autonomy, belonging and function in informal music communities

'You said you'd meet me

On the sunny road'

['Sunny road', Emiliana Torrini](#)

Exploring participant narratives in music scenes and communities elicited themes of autonomy, social action, inclusion and engagement. Young people were able to explore and learn within the *substance* of music. Whilst habitus was relatively unconstrained in these contexts, only limited formal or legitimate music capital was accrued.

6.4.1. Autonomy and Identity

Associations between music activity and identity formation and transformation have been well established in musicological literature for some time (see Frith, 1978, Shuker, 1994). Participant activity in music communities was characterised by the freedom to move in and out of musical spaces quickly and often. Young people explored and developed music tastes, engaging with music they liked and identified with. Music scenes provided a space and place for self-expression. Dylan revelled in finding new radio stations that offered an insight into a musical world he had for so long been unaware. Music scenes sprung up as like-minded people discovered and shared an appreciation for particular styles of music. Informal music communities offered the power to explore and develop musical styles and contexts. Iggy's sense of autonomy was palpable in his assertion that involvement in the 'Indy' music scene was 'finding what it's all about, for me'.

Self-development of personal identity often takes place against the *other*-imposed ascription of collective identity. Music can provide useful tools in such contests. Batt-Rawden and de Nora (2005, p. 90) described how music experiences provided people with the power 'to construct themselves'. Rowe (2012) found that music scenes had the potential to allow young people to explore and choose their own identity. Rowe (2012) argued the need to carve out personal agency was particularly important in contexts where young people had been ascribed generic, and often pejorative, identities - in this case as

members of Adelaide's 'metalcore' scenes. Many participants in my research, hailing from the outer west of Melbourne, were challenged by similar negative demographic identities. Pitts (2007, p. 148) found that teenagers involved in informal music activities experienced 'powerful effects on self-esteem and identity formation'. It is easy to see how young people were attracted to music communities and scenes and the opportunities that were provided to forge strong and individual personas.

Baker (2007) explored how constraints placed on decision making in community music activities affected young people's perceptions of autonomy and choice, and subsequently the nature and level of their involvement with music activities. Likewise, my participants were able to assess the culture and characteristics of particular scene(s) in deciding whether to remain in or leave space(s). Movement within and between music scenes was influenced by perceptions of personal levels of autonomy and choice. Both Finn and Andrew played significant roles in shaping the substance and style of a succession of genre-based music scenes. Emma left an insular and limiting local music scene to (re)assert her power to explore her own musical journey. Gordon moved between a series of bands because other members 'became too controlling', limiting his power to actively engage with his choice of musical style and direction.

6.4.2. Social capital, action and inclusion

Informal music communities provided a sense of inclusion, friendship and belonging – traits commonly associated with the 'social capital' of multifarious communities (Putnam, 2000). Dylan and his friends enjoyed hanging out at their local youth community centre. They made friends, performed with and for one another and clearly revelled in the social aspects of the community. Iggy felt 'safest and happiest' playing and partying with his local band scene. For some, local and informal music scenes provided far more crucial social needs. Andrew was attracted to Heavy Metal scenes because these 'magical places' provided the opportunity to explore feelings and ideas that his home and church communities had eschewed. Andrew's 'best friends came out of that community, like one big family'. Music scenes like these had the potential to

promote 'a shared emotional connection as well as the give and take of relationships between individuals' (Parker, 2010, p. 35). Ben's close association with outer western suburbs metal scenes was largely driven by serious personal and domestic challenges. The music community he and his friends were able to create offered safety, acceptance and support not provided at home. These kinds of music scenes were similar to the kinds of musical loci that Gallan (2012) and Rowe (2012) argued 'fostered a sense of belonging' (Gallan, 2012, p. 36).

Unsurprisingly young people withdrew from music communities as support, inclusion and friendship diminished. Ben eventually drifted away from the metal scene as camaraderie and care gave way to risks and in-fighting associated with the use of drug and alcohol. Gordon left a band on the verge of 'making it' because he perceived other members were not supportive of his music directions or contributions. Similarly, Rowe (2012), investigating the observance of culture and rules around 'moshing' in 'Hardcore' scenes, found members were challenged by newcomers who failed to support other dancer's sense of safety and inclusion.

6.4.3. Enjoyment, engagement and informal learning

Music communities abounded with the enjoyment of music. Connections with music were based on enjoyment of the function and substance of various music styles, rather than specific learning within the form of music. Batt-Rawden and de Nora (2005, p. 289) referred to this as 'informal musical learning and its link to health, well-being and the care of self'. Finn's light-hearted description of his adolescent music making as 'terrible' conveyed fond recollections and a particular sense of pride in the disorganised sound and purpose of the music. He and his friends explored the sounds and feelings that new and loud instruments could create. They enjoyed one another's company. These *informal* experiences invoke Bourdieu's (1986, p. 26) notion of 'collective festivity', a stark contrast to the 'impeccable *formalism*' associated with the notion of privileging (musical, cultural) form over function. Ben reported that listening to and playing music with friends felt 'natural'. Others reminisced about gigs, singing along with the bands and their friends in the crowd.

Young people were drawn to local music scenes through preference for and identification with musical styles and their associated social and cultural characteristics. Iggy's involvement in the local band scene was all about living, loving and making 'Indy Rock' music. Young people here were enjoying themselves rather than planning for serious 'careers' in music. Graham and his friends engaged with folk music as a vehicle for exploring cultural and political issues.

Learning in these music scenes was informal, self-directed and tended to involve understanding and exploring the functional aspects of music, rather than formal learning (and knowing) of music. Iggy came to understand how music related to his developing sense of self and to express his ideas, values and emotions without 'being told exactly how music operates.' Farrah learned how to act and think independently 'in the wedding singer scene'. Batt-Rawden and de Nora (2005) argued self-reflection, emotional development and connection and empowerment could be brought about by and through informal or unstructured music activities.

A notable feature of these music communities was emphasis on the creation of sound and music. Young people wrote their own music and performed and recorded this original material. Andrew's bands made their own merchandise, selling caps, badges and T-shirts at gigs and community festivals. Delaney and Caroline sang and played at small country town pubs and clubs where audiences enjoyed their unique songs and harmonies. These stories were consistent with findings that young people in informal music scenes derive a sense of joy and pride in creating and producing their own self realised creative product (Bloustien, 2007).

However, participants struggled in music scenes that became 'too serious' or 'no fun'. Andrew was shocked and distressed by criticisms that his band was not a '*proper*' Heavy Metal band. He had always enjoyed and explored all styles of Heavy Metal and had understood that the music scene was similarly accommodating. Farrah and Harry grew tired of criticisms that they relied on backing tracks in performances rather than '*real*' musicians. Ben struggled to engage in a 'professional music scene because they were 'serious' musicians and he was just some Heavy Metal kid'. Cope (2002) found engagement in

music activities could be significantly increased by minimising unrealistic and formal learning and prioritising music making over music learning. Paradoxically, participants were beginning to understand that ‘mucking about’ in bands and going to gigs was seen as inferior to ‘proper’ music learning

6.4.4. Concluding remarks on informal music communities

Informal, non-institutional, music fields were characterised by a habitus of self-directed creation of music experiences and a ‘natural’ prioritisation of the function over the ‘formal’ characteristics of music. Informal learning (as a *particular* cultural capital) derived value via *internal* reference and legitimisation within communities. Traditional (*external*) forms of cultural capital, as legitimised music knowledge taught and reproduced within formal education fields, were absent in these music communities. Informal music scenes were sites of *production* where active and personal creativity and expression contrasted to the passive *reproduction* associated with traditional notions of the nature and purpose of formal education.

However, freedom to choose music activities and preferences began to be accompanied by the societal and sub societal markers of distinction - the rules of engagement within the playing field. Within scenes, certain bands and players were identified as better, or more valuable, than others. Interpretation of the form and structure of music became relevant. The valuing of one subgenre of a music style over another became grounds for contest. These developments can be interpreted through Bourdieu’s (1986) argument that cultural capital is established through the appreciation of value in particular art forms and how these art forms should be read or appreciated. Participants’ music preferences and activities were now questioned as they encountered ‘the moment form takes over from function’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21). Their cultural (and musical) preferences were now bound within the societal processes of legitimisation.

It appears that participant autonomy and agency were affected, or at least contextualised, by the learning of a social emphasis on style over substance. As young people they learned that different cultural value was attached to certain styles of music. Voices dictating the importance of musical form became louder whilst participant voices faded away as they learned that the music they liked to

listen to was not valuable or 'appropriate'. Young people's music choices, activities and identities became further subject to societal constraints.

6.5. Engagement, satisfaction and autonomous learning in organised music communities

'Metamorphosis', Philip Glass

Analysis of participation in community music organisations evinced high levels of engagement, inclusion and informal learning. Organised community programs provided opportunities for participants to engage in programs of music composition, performance and participation. For Bridie, such programs enabled her to 'take music to another place' and emphasised the enjoyment of *playing* (with) music. Effie's community orchestra 'had a different feel to school' because the group engendered a more supportive culture than she had experienced in her High School music programs. Participants enjoyed and were highly engaged with community organisations. Stories highlighted the characteristics of friendship and support around and through music activities. Pitts (2007) found similarly high levels of engagement and enjoyment in music activities in organised community musical contexts. Likewise, Kokotsaki and Hallam (2011) reported that a majority of participants involved in organised community music activities, outside of institutional contexts, emphasised the pleasurable and fun aspects of their involvement.

Organised community music groups providing support and belonging acted as a second home for some participants. Graham's folk troupe travelled in rural areas, performing in villages and towns to country people who rarely saw organised music performances. The members shared stories, food, and laughter and lived together for months at a time. Graham warmly remembered these times as some of the most contented in his life. Parker (2010) found that young singers in an elective choral group experienced high levels of support and belonging. Members acknowledged the importance of choosing to join the group and the way the choir operated as a supportive team. 'We rely on one another' reported one respondent (Parker, 2010, p. 346). When one of my participants' mother died suddenly, members and directors of her community orchestra rallied around and provided love, comfort and support for her.

Kokotsaki and Hallam (2011) and Lamont (2011) have acknowledged the potential for significant music learning despite the absence of structured pedagogies and assessment processes. Community music organisations discussed by participants offered opportunities for learning about music which was not formally assessed and was overwhelmingly practice based. Effie described the community orchestra as a very well structured and highly organised program. She learned specific music skills through mentoring from more senior orchestra members and leaders and through several concert series supported by consistent practice sessions. 'We learned through doing' she said. Performances were public (and often well attended by the local community) but were assessed only by enthusiastic applause rather than structured evaluation. Alannah learned organisation and professionalism as part of a community theatre group, preparing for national and international touring of productions. Skills were gained through engagement, following the examples set by senior actors and the instructors. Alannah reported 'the more I acted, the more I learned'. High levels of music learning through involvement with organised community choirs, amongst other informal music making, has been explored in the United Kingdom (Lamont, 2011). Kokotsaki and Hallam (2011) also found their participants developed significant musical experience and know-how through involvement with community ensemble groups.

Participants detailing experiences with structured, private music lessons accrued different levels of music skills. Overwhelmingly, participants sought out or arranged private music tuition themselves. Kyrie and Djava funded their own private lessons, whilst Effie 'begged' her parents for violin lessons. She went on to complete a high AMEB level, taking on all the responsibility for practice and exams by herself. By her own admission, her family was not musical and none of her siblings showed an interest in music. Those who undertook private music lessons did so in order to increase their technical music knowledge and to so increase the playing opportunities increased instrumental awareness offered. In some cases, participants sought out private music lessons because that opportunity did not exist at their schools (Fabian, Djava and Fabian). Effie, Delaney and other participants undertook private lessons because they considered the level of instrumental tuition offered by schools to be inadequate.

A culture of music tuition existed for some participants where friends ‘taught’ other friends in a less structured context (such as Ben, Andrew and George). Friends with interests in the same music styles and directions hung out together and passed between one another the latest techniques, tricks and information. These informal ‘lessons’ were characterised by an active sense of generosity and sharing and a strong and common passion to learn more about types of music and the instrumental techniques employed within them.

6.5.1. Concluding remarks on organised music communities

Clearly, participants possessed high levels of autonomy concerning musical interests and direction. They engaged actively in their own musical journeys rather than being passively forced to undertake lessons by parents or others. The importance of agency and self-direction pursuing music learning opportunities is corroborated by Johnson’s (2009) exploration of how young adults experience music learning. Young people, like those in this inquiry, were able to accrue a degree of music capital (dependent upon the formal nature of private music tuition) whilst maintaining a relatively unconstrained habitus, particularly in the context of the freedom of choice concerning the loci and nature of music tuition. In the organised community music contexts my participants’ habitus was relatively unconstrained and levels of cultural (music) capital were varying depending upon the nature of the musical learning. Learning resembling curricula and pedagogies of formal music education tended to invest in participants higher levels of cultural capital. Learning that was more informal in nature tended to invest lower levels of cultural capital but resulted in higher levels of satisfaction, well-being and engagement.

6.6. Inclusion, well-being, identity and the role and function of music in religious communities

[‘Hold me through’, Luke Howard](#)

6.6.1. Support and belonging

Pentecostal and local Catholic Church communities were spaces and places of support and belonging for over one third of the participants. These fields

exhibited characteristics of many other communities 'a fluid social network, shaped by shared and evolving cultural and media(ted) activities' (Bloustien, 2007, p. 447). The vast majority of these religious communities employed Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) as a means for facilitating the praise and worship activities of the various church groups, and to 'reinforce evangelical Christian faith' (Lindenbaum, 2012, p. 71). Religious fields provided places for cultural association and familiarity for some participants, particularly immigrants or those outside mainstream cultural groups. Cora's family had emigrated from South America and were immediately welcomed into a local Pentecostal Church whose congregation was formed around Spanish language and culture. For Cora 'Spanish Church was the (only) community.'

Participants operated within local and national networks of church communities, developing friendships and musical connection with a wide range of young people. Members of these communities accepted one another as kindred spirits, tied together through a strong sense of praise and worship and a love and interest for the role music, almost always Contemporary Christian Music played in church activities. Such communities were able to provide unconditional acceptance - contrasted with the critical eye sometimes cast upon participants' religious and musical choices by those outside of religious communities. Church communities were 'inclusive and welcoming' creating supportive environments where 'encouragement was provided for the 'right lifestyle choices'. Members of these communities provided support and guidance for one another. Participants felt they were important members of a 'spiritual family'. Elle revelled in the fact that she had 'friends everywhere, all around Australia'. Lindenbaum (2012) uncovered similar stories of belonging, structure and support in an evangelical movement in an outer Sacramento suburb in California.

Unsurprisingly, challenges arose when these communities failed to provide support for participants. Both Andrew and Finn were challenged by criticism from their religious communities about 'unpopular' music directions and lifestyle choices. Finn was surprised and disappointed by his church community's criticism of his choice to support friends exploring their sexual orientation. Andrew felt rejected when friends began to ignore him at church activities,

because, by his understanding, he had begun listening to 'the wrong kind of music'. Research into congregational communities also found that tensions between some members' lifestyle choices and those of the remainder of the congregation was likely to lead to a reduced sense of support and belonging (Mammana-Lupo et al., 2014).

6.6.2. Enjoyment and well being

Hartje (2009) explored how contemporary styles of 'praise and worship' music – those musical styles closely associated with Contemporary Christian Music - played an important role in creating a sense of joy and unity in evangelical and Pentecostal communities. Lindenbaum (2012) posited that Pentecostal and evangelical communities were often more successful in stemming congregational attrition, in part due to the attraction of the use of popular, less traditional, styles of music. Respondents to my investigation enjoyed hearing and performing the styles of contemporary music associated with Pentecostal worship. Music in Church communities was more exciting than music often heard in traditional church settings or in school music contexts. Lindenbaum (2012, p. 79) noted that attendees at evangelical or praise and worship music activities often acted as though they were at secular music concerts. Music performance provided opportunities to express participants' 'passion and enjoyment'. For a few, praise and worship offered a chance to hear styles of music frowned upon in the family home. Dylan looked forward to the weekend's church activities where he first heard music styles like Blues and Rock 'n' Roll.

For some participants, music grew more important than the spiritual or religious aspects of these church communities. Finn and Andrew's musical exploration took precedence over the 'praise and worship' aspects of their respective church communities and resulted in a slow drift away from religious communities to scenes more specifically focused on music activities. Helena played an active part in her local church community and appreciated the different styles of music she and her friends chose for praise and worship sessions. However, she eventually came to resent her role in these activities as it became clear that her musical talents and hard work were not being acknowledged. Helena came to believe her efforts were being taken for granted

and the role and importance of the music was not being acknowledged. Helena's involvement in the church community became 'a responsibility rather than a joy'.

6.6.3. Agency and identity

Young people experienced a great deal of personal agency, development and independence within community religious fields. Music activities as part of church cultures provided opportunities for responsibility and leadership not offered in other fields. Cora was organising and leading church musical worship activities by the time she was 13 years of age. By her own admission she 'took things seriously' but derived a great sense of satisfaction and pride in her level of autonomy and accountability. Dylan led Church bands and strived for better sound so that the music could function more effectively in the praise and worship contexts. He clearly enjoyed this important role and clearly felt he rose to the challenge.

Hartje (2009) and Mammana-Lupo et al. (2014) have established links between spirituality, music and the development of personal identity and direction in Pentecostal communities. The participants in this study involved with Church communities developed a sense of personal orientation and direction through involvement with music activities. Hung felt that because 'music tells your story' he had to decide what was important to him and who he was in order to narrate *his* musical story authentically. Others highlighted music's role in the development of 'a sense of self'. Cora developed original music to facilitate worship activities. She summed up this process as 'growing to understand who you are as a person and learning to express that musically'.

Conversely, some tended to struggle when autonomy became constrained within church communities. Members of congregations supported musical exploration, but within 'accepted' limitations. Helena struggled with the expectation that 'music was for God, not for the self'. Helena was passionate about certain music styles and performers but harboured a sense of guilt about enjoying hearing and performing music *in its own right*. Cora worked hard to convince church Elders that 'new' music styles should be incorporated into worship activities. Interestingly it appeared Cora's strong sense of self provided

the conviction that what she was doing was right, and allowed her to push forward despite the criticism. Cora's struggles are illustrative of the broad debates in and amongst religious communities concerning the appropriateness of styles, periods and genres of music to facilitate worship (Hartje, 2009). Conflict around the style and use of music in religious communities highlights wider tensions concerning the rights of the individual to choose personal paths inconsistent with particular cultural expectations.

Some participants began to lose interest in church communities as they experienced pressures to pursue paths different from their own developing musical and life choices. Some came to realise that what had once been a new world of music within the church was in fact a rather narrow canon of music. Lindenbaum (2012) explored emerging tensions when individual agency and life choices began to diverge from with the collective morality of religious organisations. Finn's lifestyle choices became 'morally unacceptable' in the eyes of the church community. Andrew discovered 'girls, drugs and parties' and struggled to hide, then defend, these lifestyle choices to members of his church community. Andrew experienced this criticism as a constraint on his development as a young adult and eventually severed ties with the church community.

6.6.4. Concluding remarks on the religious community field

Several inconsistencies and paradoxes were at play in this unique field. Participant narratives varied in relation to whether they still 'believed' or felt they had moved away from the Church. Additionally, my data set comprised a relatively large proportion of associations with Pentecostal communities. Conservative estimates indicate only around 3% of young Australians have Pentecostal affiliations (Abraham, 2013). That over one third of participants had significant musical experiences in these religious communities makes this field worthy of particular comment.

Were these religious experiences placed within community or institutional fields - or did they exist in a mutually inclusive, idiosyncratic, space somewhere in between these two fields? Agency and participant habitus were constrained by family and yet there was often joy, belonging, fulfilment and learning. Despite

there being familial and church community expectations of attendance and participation in church communities, participants voiced personal choice and spiritual fulfilment in church involvement.

In some cases the music appeared inextricably linked to the spiritual. Individual involvement in religious communities was not voluntary - it was expected young people would attend with family as a part of the wider cultural community. Such expectations represented a lack of individual choice and agency. However, particularly as youths, participants appeared to actively enjoy, and flourish in, these religious communities. It is clear that music played a large role in church and worship activities and so ameliorated the absence of a constrained habitus. These people all described an early interest in music. Religious communities provided further opportunities for engagement with and exploration of this passion. The *musical* aspects of worship provided the opportunity for expression of choice and the development of a musical agency, despite the fact that the participation in the community itself was not a choice per se.

Dylan's believed young people were more engaged with the large Pentecostal worship and music than 'traditional' services. This appeared a potent example of the complex dichotomy between agency/choice and music/organised religion. Indeed, many participants spoke about the 'active youth culture' around music particularly in these communities. Participants engaged with people their own age to choose, prepare and develop music activities. Whilst contributing to the worship culture of the community, young people engaged in music making according to their own self-made rules. Involvement in church musical activities allowed participants to develop personal and social skills associated with agency. Cora clearly identified herself as a leader of the music ministry declaring:

'I took things seriously and oversaw the team. I chose songs, prepared the program for service, provided music for people and organised the players.'

These were the words of a young person entering adulthood and developing a personal sense of power. The responsibility accompanying the ability to determine important aspects of the worship community created a potent sense

of competency in self that was necessary for the development of an assured adult identity.

Despite the fact that many were required to attend and engage in religious communities for various social, cultural and familial reasons, experiences of religious communities were generally positive. Young people enjoyed religious communities and negotiated these fields successfully because they were able to play a far more active and 'free' role due through musical activity. It could be argued that those like Cora were able to create their own 'rules of engagement' in the Pentecostal environments. Church leaders and other members understood the benefits of allowing youth led music activities in terms of attendance and engagement (see Lindenbaum, 2012, Hartje, 2009, Mammana-Lupo et al., 2014). For Helena, whose 'outlet for music was Church' the distinction was easy to draw because her musical engagement at Church was 'more exciting than what was happening at school'. Those participants involved with religious communities clearly valued the opportunity for creativity, artistic freedom and leadership.

Religious communities utilised music as a vehicle for praise and worship. Stylistic consideration and formal music knowledge was considered incidental the spiritual role of music. A reliance on traditional music forms and rigid adherence to strict musical canons are more closely associated with more traditional religious environments (Hartje, 2009), (Small, 2009). Whilst my investigation is far from a close inspection of religious communities, or the nature and engagement of various demographics within such communities, it is noteworthy that Pentecostal environments provided a number of positive engagements within these communities. Young people enjoyed the freedom to explore and engage with music as part of community. Participants experienced a sense of musical agency within functional, rather than formulaic, music activities.

Pentecostal communities might not have provided the circumstances for the accrual of traditional notions of music capital. These spaces did however offer greater levels of personal fulfilment and engagement with and through music in addition to learning to appreciate the religious values of the community. Participants were able to successfully negotiate these fields despite low levels

of music capital. Religious and spiritual communities appeared less interested in cultural markers of distinction (notwithstanding an observance of particular 'religious' distinction). Religious communities offered a sense of practical agency and enjoyment set apart from formulaic observances of religious/spiritual 'rules'. Young people were keen to be involved in church communities because they provided a space and place to foster *their own* interest in music. That this could be achieved within the limitations of familial and community cultures contrasted to other fields where constrained agency occurred.

6.7. Form, function, agency and the accrual of cultural capital in secondary High School music programs

'All in all it's just another brick in the wall

All in all you're just another brick in the wall'

['Another brick in the wall', Pink Floyd](#)

Analysis of participants' prior experiences in education fields, specifically High School music programs, elicited varying levels of formal (music) learning in the accrual of cultural (music) capital. Analysis of the data manifested relatively limited community characteristics and aspects of enjoyment and agency.

6.7.1. Music capital and community characteristics in High School music programs

All participants reported at least some involvement with High School music programs. However, only three participants evaluated their experiences in High School music as overwhelmingly positive. George and Andrew attended private Melbourne Secondary Colleges with a reputation for a high level of participation and achievement in music syllabi. Kyrie attended a specialist public High School with a widely well-regarded music program. These High School music programs were described as well resourced, adequately prioritised within the school structure and culture, and staffed by suitably qualified music teachers (who were 'passionate' about music teaching). These music programs were characterised by a didactic 'traditional' approach to music pedagogy which placed emphasis on repetition and recall in learning, particularly in relation to

the theoretical aspects of music. Programs' curricula revolved around Classical and traditional Jazz repertoire. The schools offered a wide variety of Jazz and concert bands. These music programs were characterised by a prioritisation of learning the form of traditional music curriculum as opposed to addressing alternative roles music might play in students' lives. Music curriculum and pedagogy focused on encouraging students to successfully reproduce a relatively narrow range of music repertoire (for example, those pieces on VCE curriculum lists) according to widely accepted performance criteria.

Kyrie, Andrew and George established a high level of learning from music classes during their time at High School, particularly in relation to the fundamental aspects of music theory. Kyrie was coerced into the school choir as punishment for poor behaviour in generalist music classes and so learned to hear and sing harmonies and tune up intonation and aural skills. All three participants went on to undertake and successfully complete VCE music in Year 12, with relatively high levels of achievement in the subject. Research in school music education has found, similarly, that well-resourced secondary music programs focusing on structured music curricula and effective pedagogies emphasising the importance of the understanding of the form of music have tended to produce graduates with music skills and knowledge recognised by the wider music communities, tertiary institutions and industries (see Freer, 2008, Lamont, 2011, Moore, 2012, Pulman, 2010).

Most participants were involved in music programs at a range of local High Schools and church associated colleges, predominantly in the inner and outer west of Melbourne. Positive experiences in High School music programs highlighted the enjoyment of the social aspects and the sense of 'community' and belonging found in music programs. Belinda and Alana were members of 'tight-knit' High School music programs and felt accepted and supported by other students within the program. Caitlin made firm friends with other music students and saw her High School music program as a 'community based around music'. Graham saw the Music Program at his local High School as a 'home away from home' and felt 'welcomed' and supported by the teachers in the program. Graham though emphasised that the music program involved no real 'formal' music teaching, but rather consisted of 'just playing together'. Pitts

(2007) and Parker (2010) discovered similar community characteristics (such as high levels of social inclusion) in different High School music programs. However those studies tended to focus on secondary schools offering highly regarded music departments and curricula.

High School music students derived a sense of personal autonomy through choices as to what and how they learned, often in an informal ways. Andrew became involved with the Heavy Metal music scene at his school. The group functioned outside the structured music programs at the High School and students organised their own activities, listening to and borrowing music, discussing favourite artists and gigs, establishing bands and organising out of school rehearsals. The group emerged through opposition to, or frustration with, the conservative and limited nature of music teaching and repertoire offered by the school. Elle persevered with the school choir, despite discouragement from her friends and classroom teacher. She derived a sense of accomplishment and confidence from these actions. Emma learned to take responsibility for her own learning, and for her High School music group's rehearsals, because the music program was not well organised enough to ensure effective practice schedules. Belinda identified a positive aspect of unstructured music classes, where there was often no music teacher in attendance, emphasising the importance of open discussions amongst the students about personal issues and 'growing up'. Caitlin joined one of the school's ensemble groups and learned the importance of 'how to function effectively within a group'. Countryman (2009) and Georgii-Hemming and Westvall (2010) detailed high levels of agency and autonomy in secondary school music participation in contexts where students were able (or were driven) to explore their own music interests.

Students used limited High School music resources to explore their own music interests. Gordon and Fabian used the school music room to 'muck about' in at lunch times. Gordon plucked a bass guitar while his friend played the drums. Fabian enjoyed 'banging on the drums' while he and his mates 'made fun noises'. Although she admitted she 'did not learn much' Helena developed 'creativity and imagination' through experimenting with timbres on the school's keyboards, testing how sound might be used in drama performances and other art activities.

The High School music programs discussed here were characterised by relatively low levels of formal music learning and a lack of emphasis on music structures and forms. However these programs produced high levels of appreciation of the function and use of music in the development of participant identity. The majority of participants in these music programs accrued relatively low levels of cultural (music) capital, but, conversely enjoyed relatively high levels of personal agency, social inclusion and well-being.

6.7.2. How NOT to do music education: challenges in High School music programs

Twenty-five participants experienced relatively low levels of formal music learning in their High School music programs resulting in frustration, disappointment, anger and disillusionment. In a few instances the extremely low quality of music education resulted in perceptions that High Schools offered no music community or culture.

Limited formal music education in High School programs resulted from inadequate music resources, a lack of priority within the wider school curriculum and culture, poorly motivated or insufficiently skilled music teachers and an overall lack of organisation and structure. These High School music programs did not provide a sufficient focus on understanding (or knowing) music and thus did not produce accepted levels of music skills and knowledge for participants. Fourteen of the 28 participants attended schools unwilling or unable to provide VCE music units. Eleven of the 15 participants who attended schools with VCE music programs, described them as 'poor' or 'inadequate'.

Students in poorer quality music programs were not provided with sufficient musical instruments or were expected to make do with low quality and poorly maintained musical instruments. Music teaching took place in spaces unsuitable for music teaching or which were poorly designed for music teaching. Music departments in these schools were small, often with only one or two teachers. Instrumental lessons were often not provided by the school, but rather through private music teachers who used school premises to teach school music students. 'The music department always gets the cuts' lamented Alana, speaking of the local outer western suburbs High School she attended. Alana, a

pre-service teacher undertaking a music major, observed that funding constraints were still occurring in the outer suburban High Schools where she was completing her placements. Music programs existed at the periphery of the school's operations. Music was not 'treated like a serious subject', and the schools 'did not care about music'. Music departments were 'pushed to the side' and music students were not accommodated in timetable and other organisational decisions.

Some music teachers in these programs were insufficiently qualified to teach music or to teach music to the required level, so that students like Effie 'learned very little'. Other music teachers presented as unmotivated or uninterested in music classes. Students gleaned that for some teachers the teaching of music was 'just a job'. Other teachers appeared bent on making the learning of music as unenjoyable as possible, either through inaccessible or inappropriate repertoire choices or teaching that lacked passion and creativity. Unsurprisingly students in these music programs accrued relatively low levels of music capital.

6.7.3. Concluding remarks on the secondary music education field

An interesting paradox is apparent in relation to participant experiences in High School music programs. On one hand, participants were critical of High School music programs where music learning was seen to be insubstantial or inadequate. By extension the programs had not adequately prepared participants for further tertiary music study. High School music programs negatively assessed by students failed to produce (or *reproduce*) sufficient student understanding of musical *form*. Bourdieu (1986) argued that a primary role of education is to teach people how to *recognise* and *understand* cultural forms such as art and music. In the context of a High School music program, recognition and understanding of 'music' often equates to an ability to *identify* and *read* legitimate works of music. Educational processes have prioritised efforts to provide 'mastery of the means of grasping the distinctive properties which this particular form takes on its relations with other forms...' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 36). Indeed, if 'educational qualifications come to be seen as a guarantee of the capacity to adopt the aesthetic disposition' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 20) then it is clear that an institution (such as a High School music program)

that could or did *not* meet this 'guarantee' was likely to be viewed negatively by students.

However, negative assessments of learning experiences in High School music programs do not tell the whole story. Participants related positive experiences from High School music programs where learning about music was not paramount or particularly effective. Participants made friends, formed close communities bound together through a shared interest in and enjoyment of music and enjoyed various aspects of the music communities within High Schools. Belinda spoke about her feeling of 'belonging' within the music community at her High School, despite criticising a lack of music learning at school. Emma identified the importance of the support that her school music community provided and emphasised the non-competitive nature of the school music community environment. It is interesting to note the contrast with (the few) High School music programs participants identified as 'high quality'. These programs prioritised accepted formalised learning and assessment standards involving a process of criteria based assessment and ranking both within the school and the state schooling system.

Analysis of these participant experiences in High School music programs elicits some interesting common themes. Firstly, the more a school music program prioritised form over function, the more it was seen as 'legitimate' or of 'value'. Conversely however, High School music programs emphasising function tended to exhibit the characteristics of informal music communities. Secondly, High School music programs emphasising form over function tended to result in a limitation of (musical) agency of the participants within that program. Student agency was proscribed through the emphasis on:

- music style – for example Classical rather than Heavy Metal
- music characteristics such as rhythmic and harmonic analysis rather than individual idiosyncratic emotional responses
- instrumental choice such as orchestral and large band ensemble rather than electric guitar and turntables
- highly directive pedagogies in the form of music class timetables and scheduled school instrumental and ensemble practices (accompanied

by a clear expectation of practice time and technique), rather than self-directed or even unmonitored musical activity.

Experiences were likely to be viewed positively where levels of autonomy were high, or where choice (in the form of taste/habitus) was less proscribed, particularly in relation to emotional responses such as satisfaction, well-being and enjoyment. Participants were more likely to express positive responses about music activities in contexts where they were 'free' to choose what to listen to and how they might appreciate it. In contexts that were relatively unfettered by particular valuations of musical taste there was a palpable sense of 'release', rather than the tension created by institutional program guidelines and directions.

6.8. Coda: Contrasting and reassessing habitus and capital in community and secondary institutional music fields

Participants experienced a range of challenges in negotiating community and pre-tertiary education fields. These challenges involved anxiety, powerlessness, passivity and disillusionment in the face of the constricting nature of structured environments and formal learning contexts. However, participants were able to actively disrupt, or break free of, limitations in more informal circumstances where community characteristics played a dominant role. In such places and times, participants experienced joy, freedom, belonging and a renewed love for musical practice and exploration. Participants thus became more autonomous and active in their musical journeys.

The developments, challenges to, and interpretations of, habitus and capital are explored further in the following chapters where I discuss participant negotiation of formal tertiary music fields. Chapter 7 explores the nature of and reasons behind various 'tensions' experienced by students in formal tertiary music study. Chapter 8 discusses the resilience and possibility surrounding 'release' experiences of these same students.

Chapter 7. **Tension: challenges in negotiating tertiary music education**

7.1. **Prelude**

*'When routine bites hard
and ambitions are low
And resentment rides high
but emotions won't grow
And we're changing our ways,
taking different roads'*

['Love Will Tear Us Apart', Joy Division](#)

In Chapter 6 I explored participant music making, doing and learning in a range of formal and informal pre tertiary fields. The discussion focused on the accrual of music capital and on how field dynamics shaped, accommodated or constrained the habitus of participants. This second discussion chapter addresses the same participants as they negotiate the transition from pre tertiary music fields to journey through three distinct but overlapping institutional field(s) of tertiary music education; Vocational Education (VE) music courses, Higher Education (HE) music education courses and Higher Education (HE) music specific courses.

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) studies of education fields and symbolic violence posit that educational institutions, within traditional social structures, operate as loci for the reproduction of accepted forms of knowledge that society holds to be the most valuable, by teaching (or reproducing) that which is already known (and valued or legitimated). This chapter describes the challenges and struggles (the *tensions*) experienced by participants entering, then negotiating, formal tertiary music fields with limited cultural (music) capital and agency and, often, seemingly incompatible habitus to the formulaic and (re)productive dynamics of education field(s). Chapter 8 covers the successes (the *releases*) of participants as they challenged constraints to habitus and accrued cultural (music) capital to develop a sense of resilience, personal agency and well-being within the tertiary music education fields. As the chapter titles suggest, I also

continue with the use of a metaphor framework to assist with data analysis, using music language to help to contextualise the stories being explored. For the purposes of this discussion, data collected from the three participant groups (Vocational Music (VE 1), HE Music Education Specialisation (HE 1) and HE Bachelor of Music Graduates (HE 2)) are discussed in the context of each field. Collective discussion is then undertaken of all participant experiences within tertiary music education.

I continue to employ multiple analytical lenses, some of which were used in the previous chapter, to view the data from this research and inform discussions. To reiterate, Bourdieu (1977, 1986) has used social/cultural theory to explore cultural and learning experiences. Researchers such as Pitts (2007, 2012) and Green (2007) have explored student music learning from musicological, sociological and philosophical perspectives. Authors have combined musicological and philosophical perspectives with cultural reproduction theory to explore student experiences in music education (e.g. Moore, 2012, Rimmer, 2012). These perspectives are all utilised to discuss the experiences of the 28 participants in this study. Finally, my voice is added to those of the participants to further elucidate the discussion. This is achieved through critical autoethnographic reflection of a series of vignettes, presented in Chapter 6.

Finally, I'd like to note an important distinction between my research and much of the other research in the field. Leading research into experiences of, and intersections between, informal music experiences and formal music education has taken place in Europe and the US, and, to an extent, in Australia (see for example (Lebler, 2008, Lebler et al., 2009, Bennett, 2010)). Of particular note is that much of this research has taken place within 'first choice' tertiary institutions and educational contexts (see for example Moore, 2012, Creech et al., 2008). The following discussions explore the experiences of students undertaking music education in a self-described 'University of Opportunity' where a significant proportion of students come from lower SES (socio economic status) and 'first in family to attend university' backgrounds. At the time of writing, enrolments of low SES students at Victoria University has risen to 26% of the total student population. Fourteen of the 28 participants in this study were the first members of their families to enter tertiary education.

Discussions of habitus and capital produce specific and localised outcomes for different students and different geographical and socioeconomic circumstances. This qualitative investigation into music and music education has purposefully aimed to hear more clearly previously subdued or absent voices. It is particularly important then that voices of musicians and students in marginalised sections of these fields are *also* brought to the foreground.

7.1.1. Consonance and dissonance

In music, a consonance is a harmony, chord, or interval considered stable, as opposed to a dissonance, which is considered temporary or transitional. Generally speaking, a *consonance* is a combination of notes that sound pleasant to most people when played at the same time; *dissonance* is a combination of notes that may sound harsh or unpleasant. Dissonance within music tends to create a feeling of *tension* whereas consonance assists in producing music that promotes feelings of relief or *release*. Similarly analysis of the data in this research reveals a series of ‘ups and downs’ in participant experiences. Generally speaking ‘ups’ could be viewed as positives or ‘release’ points whereas ‘downs’ or challenges might be thought of as ‘tension’ aspects of these stories. The student narratives rise and fall in consonance and dissonance.

Bourdieu (1986, p. 73) proposed that music was the ‘most corporeal’ of the arts and was ‘pitched...in gestures and movements of the body...quickening and slowing, crescendo and decrescendo, tension and relaxation’. The use of music nomenclature to describe and analogue data is representative of the movements, and voices of the students through their musical journeys. I see these students riding the dynamic variations of their musical lives.

Tensions in negotiating the institutional tertiary music field(s) arose from a range of constraints to, or misalignments with, habitus and grappling with the dynamics of the field equipped with limited cultural (music) capital. Students experienced a range of challenges associated with the perceptions of prioritisation of form over function arising from the process of (re)production and legitimisation of cultural (music) within the field(s). Participants struggled to ‘find a voice’ in the context of hierarchical dynamics at play in the three fields of

music education. A sense of limited personal agency produced dissonant experiences.

Societal fields possess different styles and levels of 'rules'. The challenges of moving between fields are related to alignment of agent habitus to the particular 'rules' of the field. Moore (2012, p. 68) described this movement of music students within and between fields as dependent 'largely on their musical backgrounds, or habitus...' There are noteworthy parallels here with the kinds of challenges experienced by my participants when moving between prior tertiary music fields, in particular in moving from more flexible and casual informal music environments to structured music education fields. As discussed in the previous chapter, community music fields tended to accommodate and acknowledge participant music habitus whereas the secondary educational field tended to constrain participant habitus. Again, and conversely, these relative accommodation/constraints of habitus were accompanied by different levels of accrual of cultural (music) capital. Similar processes were at play in negotiating of the dynamics of the tertiary (VE and HE) music fields.

7.2. Transition into the Vocational Education music

'But then they sent me away to teach me how to be sensible

Logical, responsible, practical'

['Logical song', Supertramp](#)

Two participant groups articulated challenges associated with transitioning from pre tertiary music fields into the VE music performance field; those participants who were studying VE music performance at the time of data collection (VE 1) and those who entered the institutional field via the VE music performance field and then went on to transition into and complete the HE music performance degree (HE 2). This second group's transition from VE to HE music fields is discussed later in the chapter.

7.2.1. The practical habitus of participants transitioning into Vocational Education

Expectations of studying music at university arose from the experiences participant had in making and enjoying music prior to study. Somewhat

understandably, students enrolling in a music performance course assumed that the primary focus would be on performing music. Some were surprised and disappointed by the having to study other areas of music that did not involve practical aspects. Finn, for example, had expected more opportunity to explore his own compositional ideas, rather than having to choose and prepare what he perceived to be a limited range of repertoire. Most participants had engaged with and explored contemporary and popular forms of music, predominantly the sub genres of Rock music. Many participants experienced emotions ranging from bewilderment to disappointment when directed towards Jazz repertoire or classical music theory and notation.

Young people with backgrounds in music making, and doing, experienced challenges in 'fitting into' formal music education contexts. These challenges arose, in part, due to 'dynamic and fluid' habitus becoming 'bound by the structures of the music department' (Moore, 2012, p. 68). The institutional limitations of music departments tend to incorporate restrictions on music styles, curricular imperatives and particular pedagogical approaches. Gould (2012, p. 76) described these boundaries as 'territories of music concepts and performance skills on which pedagogies and curricula stabilize'.

Although the VE tertiary music curriculum emphasised a high degree of practical music, participants struggled with teaching styles that emphasised theoretical approaches to learning. Dylan concluded that some teachers taught only what they knew and understood in relation to a particular subject rather than exploring what the students wanted or needed to know. Fabien complained that some teachers were not able to explain how particular knowledge would be useful, or *practical*, as they entered the wider music world. Other participants wanted teaching that was 'more hands on' rather than 'sitting around and watching what was happening'. Challenges with the theoretical or abstract in tertiary music have been identified and explored (Wright, 2008, Burland and Pitts, 2007, Carey and Lebler, 2012, Cutietta, 2007). Such investigations found that tertiary music students struggle to derive clear meaning and relevance from music learning that fails to incorporate specific skills and knowledge within the function and practice of music.

Young people entered the VE tertiary educational field with a habitus firmly imbued with an enjoyment of the functional and practical making of music. In transitioning from prior music fields to tertiary music fields, students encountered challenges associated with the alignment of a predominantly practical music habitus to formulaic or theoretical aspects of tertiary music curriculum and pedagogy. These challenges also resulted in reduced agency. Whilst participants had made the choice to enter the VE music field, they quickly realised they were to have very little involvement in the design of curriculum, choice of music styles or pedagogical considerations, particularly as to how these aspects of study might better suit their practical habitus.

7.2.2. Limited cultural (music) capital

Those entering the VE tertiary music field did so with relatively limited music capital. Only three of the nine VE 1 participants had completed VCE Music Units 3 and 4 prior to entering the Music Performance course. None of VE 1 group had completed AMEB levels. All participants experienced a range of challenges associated with formulaic or theoretical aspects of the VE tertiary music field.

As outlined in the previous chapter High School music programs tended to provide only limited academic and formal music skills. Respondents believed they lacked a firm foundation of core music skills and knowledge. The majority of participants concluded they had received relatively low levels of music education during their High School years. Students also acknowledged they had gained little awareness of music theory and formal music learning through informal music activity in music communities. The student habitus was thus comprised of the often limited kinds of cultural (music) knowledge (or capital) expected by, more readily legitimated by, institutions favouring traditional formal music education (Green, 2007). Feichas (2010, p. 51) similarly asserted that those who have studied or been active in popular music, have generally acquired different 'low status' music skills that involve playing and learning by ear and by developing musical awareness with like-minded friends. In examining the differences between classically and non-classically trained musicians, Creech et al. (2008) found that UK music students who had attended

private schools tended to be familiar with Classical music and possessed a concomitant ability to understand and read written music. The researchers found participants from the state school system were not classically trained. The majority of participants in this study entered the tertiary music education field from government secondary schools. These schools tended to base curriculum and teaching on contemporary music styles, which also favoured aural and improvisational aspects of music. These findings bear some similarities with the prior musical experiences of participants to this investigation.

The VE music theory curriculum attempted to accommodate students with little experience or awareness of music theory prior to tertiary study. Music theory curriculum was conceived as 'starting at the start'. Students started by learning the basics of music nomenclature and the theory of notation. However, despite the introductory levels at which music theory curriculum commenced, both VE 1 and HE 2 participants identified the study of music theory as one of the greatest challenges. Whilst some VE 1 and HE 2 participants had studied music theory as part of their High School music programs, a surprising number were challenged by the level of music theory being offered at the beginning of the VE music course. Challenges may well have been connected to the fact that many who had studied some music theory as part of their High School music curriculum confessed they had not enjoyed the experience. So, whilst most students who came to the study of formal music theory had some prior awareness or familiarity with the nature and function of music notation, in many of these cases the level of appreciation was low. Participants lamented they had not 'learned much or enough' music theory as part of High School music programs.

Young musicians came to this field of tertiary music study from music contexts favouring pop and rock genres with a focus on aural and performative functions. Such students tended to associate the study of music theory and nomenclature with 'serious' music (Hargreaves and Marshall, 2003). Andrew struggled with Jazz Theory throughout the VE performance course and concluded he did not really know 'what was going on' until the final year of his undergraduate studies. Many admitted to having relied on aural skills 'playing by ear' rather than being confident, on indeed even competent, at reading music notation. Most preferred

the 'practical aspects' of music far more than the theoretical aspects and struggled to understand the relevance of music theory to the practice of music. The one student who expressed absolute confidence with music notation and theory, Effie, conversely struggled with improvisational aspects of the music curriculum, particularly those methods requiring specific listening skills (as opposed to reading from a score). Feichas (2010) found similar responses amongst students with classical music training, who felt they would have to work to develop aural and improvisational skills. This somewhat paradoxical dichotomy between the skills associated with form of music theory and the function of music listening and playing is evident throughout different music curricula and pedagogies (see Cope, 2002, Anderson, 2005, Hargreaves and Marshall, 2003).

Entering the tertiary music education environment with academic and musical skills deficits led to personal and psychological struggles which affected overall well-being. Students experienced anxiety, lack of confidence, and feelings of disassociation and alienation. There were also feelings of anger, embarrassment and bemusement. Djava admitted 'It's always the confidence factor with me' and this impacted on many aspects of her study, from making connections outside of class, to speaking up in class and ensemble rehearsals and most notably in actually identifying herself as a 'musician'. Other, like Isabelle, had put off applying to study music because of a lack of confidence in their musical ability. Some felt 'everyone else was better' (musically, academically) than they were. Green (2007) found popular musicians possessing low levels of music theory capital often experienced feelings of inadequacy. Anxiety and low confidence levels may well be, at least in part, attributable to the 'dominance of the talent account' in the wider music education field (Lamont, 2011, p. 372), particularly for participants identified as having low talent levels in music skills and knowledge.

7.2.3. Form and music capital in the Vocational Education music field

Tertiary music curriculum and pedagogy, including VE music at VU, has tended to place a particular emphasis on the formulaic aspects of music study. The formal study of music theory and recognised, legitimate evaluations of music

practice are illustrative of traditional curricular and pedagogical imperatives of learning and measuring the form of music, of reading music and understanding the way music works. As discussed, VE 1 and HE 2 habitus overwhelmingly involved enjoyment and participation with the function of music making in contrast to the learning and understanding of the theoretical aspects of music. Similarly music students (in this case within highly regarded 'first choice' tertiary music courses in the UK) acknowledged that 'playing for fun with others...lead to more informative learning experiences' and informal performance contexts were often more pleasurable than 'preparation' for formal learning and assessment (Papageorgi et al., 2010, p. 442). VE 1 and HE 2 backgrounds valued the playing (doing, making and hearing) of music above the learning (reading, understanding, knowing) of music. The participant habitus was clearly at odds with significant pedagogical approaches within tertiary music. Similarly, other students with popular music habitus frequently questioned the relevance of 'structured and compartmentalised' music curriculum such as music theory and history that were 'disconnected from (their) daily life' (Feichas, 2010, p. 51). In contrast to participant experiences in community music contexts, the VE education field tended to limit music *production* in favour of musical knowledge *reproduction*. To this end, Bourdieu (1986, p. 60) claimed that education fields referenced reproductive 'principles (or harmony...for example)...rather than, productive 'improvisation'.

7.2.4. Measuring music performance

Many students in the VE 1 and HE 2 cohorts struggled with issues connected to valuing and measuring music activity. Assessment criteria were criticised for being 'too hazy' and some participants complained that they did not understand how performances were assessed or how final marks were achieved. These underlying concerns related to a suspicion or lack of understanding of how the practice of music could be formally assessed. Formal assessment could be seen as the *objective* verification or legitimisation of a *subjective* and functional practice. Students' perceptions of assessment processes and principles of music performance and practice illustrated the dictation of form over function. Students clearly had misgivings and suspicions about what they saw as the

measuring of pleasure. Students were highly critical of grades and numbers imposed on their music activity (and by extrapolation, their music identities?) by teachers and assessors. Participants queried the attribution of low grades for written and academic exercises. Students struggled to understand, and yet were highly dubious, of processes of legitimacy within formulaic assessment, where music skills and knowledge were 'only valorised to the strict extent of (their) technical efficiency' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 17).

Themes of power were at play in the VE music field where students 'struggle(d) over the legitimate definition of culture and the legitimate way of evaluating it' (Bourdieu, 1986). Students remained passive within the active adjudication of their music prowess and performances, rather than 'active participants' in assessment processes (Lebler, 2007, p. 194). Participants were expected to *reproduce* normalised versions of legitimate musical works rather than *produce* music as they had done on informal community fields. Students in the VE 1 cohort occupied often uninformed and unconsulted positions at the bottom of a traditional top down hierarchical education structure (Johansen, 2009) where teachers were doers and students were done to. These students were engaged with study designed to reproduce, but which 'does not teach', legitimate cultural (music) capital, despite possessing limited music capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 18). There appeared to be an explicit expectation that students would be able to negotiate formulaic nature of the curriculum (such as music theory) with little or no additional support and that failed to acknowledge limited music skills and knowledge.

7.2.5. Social dynamics

Contemporary tertiary music education has tended to incorporate music activities involving collective student participation. Students in VE (and HE) music courses at VU were assigned to ensemble groups that chose and prepared repertoire together. Group participation required negotiation and cooperation amongst students to organise and complete assessment tasks. Tertiary music educators have long appreciated that collective music making in music education assists with the development of desirable personal attributes such as sociability, empathy, the ability to negotiate and creative action and

participation (Kokotsaki and Hallam, 2011). However, many participants experienced challenges associated with these types of group activities. Challenges appeared to arise when students possessed differing attitudes towards study and levels of engagement, motivation, aims and expectations of their music studies. Pulman (2010) explored assessment processes in group work particularly relating to self and peer evaluations and concluded that such evaluation was 'a formidable challenge' (Pulman, 2010, p. 395). Group work necessarily involves a complex and ongoing set of informal evaluations of each group member's progress, learning, attitude and achievements, individually and relationally. When Alex described students having 'different agendas and priorities', she was referring to a field comprised of agents with different, and possibly competing, habitus and levels of music capital. Students found it difficult to manage group activities and meet course expectations and requirements largely due to disparities in motivation, engagement and work practices. Challenges arose when students with different music skills, knowledge, preferences and directions were required to work together.

Tensions relating to group dynamics and social aspects were somewhat paradoxical. Social aspects of the course were most similar to those experienced in community music contexts. As outlined in the previous chapter, these features were viewed very positively by participants. However, similar community characteristics within the institutional field presented a range of struggles and negative perceptions. The paradox can be attributed to significant variations in the levels of cultural capital and habitus of the student cohort, resulting in a 'cultural dissonance' (Lahire, 2008, p. 8), rather than any general antithesis towards communal/group activities. Personal agency was also constrained in these collective activities. Students were expected to successfully negotiate social and musical dynamics within groups allocated by teachers. Participants *had no choice* but to try and work and study with students with considerably different habitus to their own.

7.2.6. Challenges with student attitudes

Despite the various tensions discussed above, many participants in this study strived to successfully negotiate the field. Many of the participants were

significantly challenged by perceptions of poor attitudes and low levels of engagement in other students. Participants were 'completely distracted' by other VE students who displayed poor behaviour in class such as chatting, talking over teachers and students or simply 'mucking about'. Ben exclaimed 'They just wanted to talk, in class, about anything but what we were learning and that was completely distracting to the rest of us.' Emma felt that 'when people are not motivated or not showing up it's frustrating' and this was highly representative of comments made by other participants. Participants were 'deflated' when ensemble group members failed to attend. Isabelle complained 'It's like they have to be coaxed, you know. If there's no drive, why don't they just stay home?' Pulman (2010, p. 406) described 'problem' students as 'free riders' who exhibited a lack of involvement, effort or commitment with their studies and distinguished these students from keen, but under-performing, tertiary music students who lacked high status music or academic skills.

Some felt other students were 'just lazy'. Kyrie observed that some students thought there was 'too much work' in the course, but countered that he 'was doing more in Year 11 and 12 Music Units than in the first year of VE study'. Cora believed that students enrolled in tertiary courses through their own volition and as a result would undertake the necessary steps to complete the course, including 'turning up to classes'. Other participants agreed that those who had decided to undertake the course were all 'adults' who should have demonstrated responsibility and reliability. That some students routinely failed to attend was a constant source of frustration for those who did. Some participants connected poor attitudes and motivation of other students with inconsistent or inequitable teaching styles. Jordan and Cora complained that some teachers failed to create effective learning environments that failed to apply consequences for poor student attendance, late submission of assessment or distracting behaviour. There was a feeling that underperforming students should not be allowed to 'get away with things'. This was seen generally as an inequity between those students who were 'doing the right thing' and those who were not. Participants hypothesised that students who acted up during class, or who demonstrated a lack of commitment or ambition to learn did so because they didn't really want to be there. Kyrie thought these students

were merely in the course in order to receive Centrelink payments whilst Alex believed that maybe they were here 'as a stop gap between school and the rest of life'. Other participants likened some poor behaviour and attitude to that of the High School 'mentality' whilst others attributed limited musical or academic ambition to 'immaturity'.

Participants observed that some students made other choices, instead of attending course related activities such as prioritising part time work, other non-course related music activities and socialising. Students who felt aggrieved and unsettled by the disruptive behaviour and poor attitudes of some fellow students proposed a range of explanations, and whilst they appeared surprised, even shocked, by these attitudes they were unable to define underlying explanations with any sense of certainty. Isabelle concluded that 'It's a good course and I don't know why people don't show'. Students with low levels of engagement often dropped out of the music courses. Discontinuation had negative impacts on many of the participants. VE participants appeared genuinely dismayed that of the 17 students who had begun the course, only 8 remained a year and half later. Farrah described feeling as though he were on a 'sinking ship'.

Poor attitudes and low levels of engagement impacted upon many participants' successful negotiation of the field. It is apparent that these student voices were in fact recognising other students' struggles with the similar constraints and lack of alignment of habitus with the field as they had experienced. Participants were able to identify similar challenges in negotiating the field with limited cultural capital. However it would appear 'problem students' were *more* challenged by these field dynamics and, at the same time, *less* able to meet the challenges to stay engaged, and successfully negotiate a way through tertiary study. Disruptive or uncommitted students who simply dropped out exhibited more pronounced effects of music habitus misaligned to formulaic and restrictive characteristics of tertiary music education. It is likely that such students possessed even lower levels of music capital than many of the participants in this study. Perhaps the tertiary music field constrained some students' functional musical habitus to such a degree that they felt they had no choice but to remove themselves from the learning context. The students may well have come to university to study music with negative experiences in music education

(and school more generally) only to learn that a university music course 'was not for them' Lamont (2011). A purposeful, in depth qualitative investigation of those students who discontinued tertiary music student is warranted in order to test these observations.

The majority of participants in this study chose, or were intending, to complete their tertiary music qualifications. Caitlin concluded that students with low levels of engagement or who discontinued with the course 'didn't enjoy music as much as me'. This statement suggests that those who 'pushed through' to accrue music capital, despite constrained or misaligned habitus, did so because their engagement with music was powerful enough to assist in managing or overcoming these challenges. Resilience, which I will discuss later, is also likely to have been a factor in eventual study success.

7.2.7. Concluding comments

Students entered the VE music field with relatively low levels of cultural capital and experienced challenges in successfully accruing music knowledge. They entered the field with practical, functional habitus and struggled with the formulaic aspects of the field like music theory, assessment and academic and administrative procedures. Participants struggled with meeting the curricular requirements of the course due to limited cultural capital. Challenges brought about by other students' poor attitude and low levels of engagement were a concerning illustration of the challenges generally faced by students with low cultural capital and misaligned habitus entering the reproductive and legitimising field of music education. Although students exercised personal agency, in a sense, by choosing to enter this educational field, this power was limited and curtailed by a somewhat passive role in curriculum, styles and pedagogy of the course, particularly relating to the student habitus and level of cultural (music) capital.

7.3. Transition into Higher Education music

'Said it's a mean old world, heavy in need

That big machine is just picking up speed'

['Hard times', Gillian Welch](#)

Nine students in the HE 1 cohort detailed substantial challenges associated with the transition from pre-tertiary music contexts to the tertiary music education field. A range of tensions were attributable to limited, but practical, musical habitus significantly misaligned to the standard and nature of the field. Challenges led to acute disappointment, anxiety and a sense of powerlessness to successfully negotiate tertiary music study.

HE 1 participants undertook music studies in preparation for becoming music teachers in the primary and/or secondary High School system. It became apparent that the expectations and realities of studying music at university in order to teach music in schools were in stark contrast to expectations. At the time of data collection, enrolling in a specialisation in music as part of a Bachelor of Education required no formal previous music study – although course and unit outlines clearly indicated that music 'experience' was advantageous. The lack of a minimum level prior music education, or indeed an audition /interview process, highlights one significant difference between tertiary music and tertiary education courses with specialisations in music. Biasutti (2010) and Faubel et al. (2009) explored students in tertiary education courses specialising in music requiring no audition for formal prior music study. Faubel et al. (2009) found these students experienced significant difficulties in meeting music and academic expectations due to limited music backgrounds.

Students undertaking a music major studied six units (out of 32) to complete a major study in music. These minimum guidelines were designed by the external accreditation for education in Victoria, the Victoria Institute of Teaching, and implemented through course structure processes at VU. The six units undertaken by education students involved a combination of music literacy (theory), practical and musicological (history and sociology) components.

7.3.1. Low cultural (music) capital

'If you haven't got a good base it's hard to build a house.' (Graham)

None of the eight participants undertaking major music study as part of their undergraduate education degrees had completed VCE music. Three (Delaney, Belinda and Alannah) had studied music to Year 11, whilst the other five participants had completed no formal music education at High School. These students expected that the music curriculum and pedagogy would account for limited music backgrounds and knowledge. Whilst foundational music theory curriculum was notionally conceived as basic and introductory, and purposefully assumed limited awareness of music theory, tertiary music academic staff appeared to have markedly higher expectations of students' music skills and knowledge.

Despite the relatively introductory nature of music theory curriculum, all HE 1 education participants struggled with meeting expected academic requirements. Caroline and Belinda believed the level was not designed for beginners and felt embarrassed and surprised that the teacher seemed 'to expect a greater level of knowledge than we (all) had'. For Graham, this disparity between limited music capital and the expectations he had of the music component of tertiary study caused significant hardship, an experience he described as 'horrible'. George, who had completed a VE music course prior to undertaking music units as part of an education degree, reported 'feeling sorry' for students who had no prior formal music experience. Belinda summed up the experiences of many participants in declaring,

'I thought my understanding of music was quite deep but looking back now – oh my god! I thought that if I loved music I could do it but then I got to theory class (at University) and had no idea what they were talking about.'

These accounts are echoed by respondents in another investigation who reported high levels of anxiety amongst students in music education courses as they struggled to attain the required level of music skills and knowledge with limited or no prior formal music training (Faubel et al., 2009). Biasutti (2010) found that pre-service teachers undertaking music specialisations with limited

formal music education suffered from an overall lack of confidence and belief in their ability to achieve the required learning.

Students in the HE 1 cohort struggled to understand the nature and relevance of music theory and other formulaic aspects of the curriculum. Those who had studied music formally at school had received low levels of formal music skills and knowledge, involving little instruction in music theory. Like students in Piits' (2009, p. 252) research 'their reports of school music were not necessarily glowing'. Those who had not formally studied music had no awareness at all of music theory. Participants appeared to have little idea that music theory was regarded as an important part of the High School curriculum and that, indeed, they would be required to learn, know and be able to teach music theory in their future roles as music educators. Such fundamental misunderstanding suggested an acute disconnect between High School music curricula and the tertiary institutions tasked with preparing music teachers.

7.3.2. Practical and limited musical habitus

HE 2 participants, though, had enjoyed active engagement with music before commencing tertiary study in organised and casual music and religious communities. Whilst these music activities were almost exclusively practical in nature, they tended to develop limited music skills. Elle and Hung enjoyed singing in the choir at her local Church; Darcy had taught himself guitar and liked to play with friends at parties; Carolyn, Alannah and Belinda identified themselves as 'only singers' who could not play other instruments. Delaney was a singer also but considered she was a 'reasonable' rhythm guitarist and Graham felt comfortable playing guitar, but only within a limited number of folk styles. None of the students had had prior professional music experience and considered that although they loved music, it had always been a 'passionate hobby'. The choice to undertake formal music studies as part of pre service teacher training was based on previous enjoyable engagement with music. These are circumstances mirrored by students in a Spanish study who chose music education solely based 'on a love of music' (Faubel et al., 2009, p. 251).

Students were required to choose and prepare music repertoire in groups with the assistance and guidance of tutors. Music performance was assessed

according to stylistic and technical criteria. Whilst students enjoyed 'hanging out' with other music students in ensemble rooms, they experienced a number of difficulties in negotiating the formal aspects of the practical music curriculum. Many struggled to choose appropriate material; suggest and work with approaches to musical arrangements; understand the amount of work required to prepare music repertoire to performance standards; and with basic technical music requirements such as pitch and rhythm. Caroline admitted she 'felt stupid' in these music classes. Performance anxiety arose for participants who felt they lacked the required level of music or performance skills. Others felt they just did not 'fit in' and for many participants, particularly in the first few months, study was a 'real struggle'.

Participants were challenged by a lack of familiarity with certain music styles used as the basis for instruction. Jazz and various sub genres associated with this music style, was a particular challenge. Participants generally struggled with any style of music they were required to learn or perform that they were not familiar with. Others were challenged by the introduction of music technology into the music curriculum, such as music notation and recording software and hardware. Some students had never seen such technology and were unaware of their necessity and role making and learning of music. Some reported a preference for 'real' or 'organic' music making as opposed to 'fake' technology. Students struggled with technical instruction they experienced as 'descriptive rather than practical'.

Music education participants struggled with developing instrumental and technical music skills. Most concluded their prior music experiences had not adequately prepared them for the standard and rigour of tertiary music study. They struggled with the formulaic nature of music curriculum, with formal restriction of repertoire choice and with technical components of formal tertiary music study. The level of anxiety and displeasure arising from these challenges was palpable within this group of participants. Indeed, self-doubt and apprehension in pre service music teachers possessing low music capital is not uncommon (see for example Rogers et al., 2008, Burnard et al., 2008).

7.3.3. Anxiety, limited personal agency and institutional power

Accreditation and course guidelines mandated the type and amount of music education students were required to complete without taking into account backgrounds and capacities. Gaps in knowledge and limited musical ability did not stem from general laziness or a refusal or inability to attain higher musical standards prior to entering the tertiary music field. Yet significant deficiencies in music capital resulted in challenges so confronting students felt as though they were being punished for a lack of preparation or suitability for music study. Biasutti (2010) found similar feelings of inadequacy amongst low status students with misaligned habitus that, in some cases, led to feelings of exclusion.

All eight HE 1 participants felt that too little time was allocated to the study of music in their education course. Students believed there were unrealistic amounts of work required outside of contact hours to complete tasks and accrue the required learning. Belinda summed up these opinions stating 'You'd really think you'd have more than one unit per semester to be a music teacher!' Similar observations were expressed in widespread research of pre-service music teachers by Faubel (2009). Biasutti (2010) has suggested that, in general, pre-service music education courses need to add more time and proportion of the curriculum to specific and targeted music study.

Many students faced significant challenges in balancing external commitments to work, family and other activities with study requirements. Most participants in the cohort had part time jobs, with some participants working between 20-40 hours per week in addition to full time enrolment in study. Many struggled to balance study commitments with family commitments. Some students juggled parental responsibilities between university commitments. Graham bemoaned that he did not get holidays as he was forced to use the university non-teaching periods to care for his children or take extra shifts at work. Some felt the sheer amount of university study and work meant that extra-curricular activities were severely constrained. HE 1 participants struggled to allocate enough time to accrue the required cultural (music) capital perhaps because such capital could

only be 'acquired by means of a sort of withdrawal from economic necessity' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 36). This was clearly not an option for these participants.

Participants clearly identified concerns and were able to articulate sensible ameliorations, but were not able to enact or engage in change. Students were unable to choose different or additional units to help with skills deficits. They could not 'reverse' discipline studies or risk delaying graduation as such an option was simply not economically viable for many. These students chose to undertake music studies as part of their education degrees due to a passion for and experience with music. Faubel et al. (2009, p. 251) found similar reasoning amongst Spanish tertiary music education students who based reasons for selecting a career in teaching music on an enjoyment and passion for music 'even though they do not have any previous knowledge'. It is unsurprising that, like the participants in my research, these students also faced significant challenges due to deficiencies in prior formal music training. Students in these situations were encouraged by universities to continue with their enrolment choices.

Music education students experienced an acute sense of powerless and anxiety in the situation they found themselves in. They feared they were unprepared for and incapable of teaching music in schools. Students worried that they had had insufficient preparation to be effective or even adequate music teachers in schools. Ironically, my participants recounted primary and secondary school experiences with music teachers who had lacked sufficient music skills and knowledge. This is not an uncommon theme in pre tertiary music education (Holden and Button, 2006). It must have been extremely confronting for pre service teachers undertaking music majors to see themselves as part of the perpetuation of professional music skills deficits in music teaching in Victorian public schools.

7.3.4. Concluding comments

HE 1 participants transitioned into formal music study with habitus imbued with a passion for and enjoyment of music. However, this habitus was so misaligned and then constrained by the dynamics of the tertiary music field that participants grew to dislike several aspects of music engagement. Of equal concern was

that limited music capital resulted in a perception that, on completion of their music education studies, they lacked the necessary music skills and knowledge (capital) required for successful negotiation of their intended vocational endeavour.

7.4. Vocational Education to Higher Education music

*'And these children that you spit on
As they try to change their worlds
Are immune to your consultations
They're quite aware of what they're going through'*

['Changes', David Bowie](#)

HE music graduates in the HE 2 cohort completed a two year VE Diploma of Music prior to entry into the Bachelor of Music course. Course rules at the time awarded these participants one year of credit in the Bachelor of Music for completion of the Diploma, meaning that these students began HE study in the second year of the Bachelor of Music. These participants all experienced a range of challenges with the transition from one educational sector (VE) into another (HE).

7.4.1. Limited cultural (academic and music) capital

Many participants moving from the VE to HE educational sector felt unprepared for the transition. Six of the 11 HE 2 group participants had completed VCE Music Units 3 and 4, whilst three had completed at least some AMEB levels. As stated, they came to HE study having completed a VE music course. However, HE studies represented a 'big step up' and some realised they would now need to 'take things much more seriously'. Iggy recalled having only a vague familiarity with academic conventions like referencing. Ben and Dylan felt they had not really been equipped with any real academic foundations for undergraduate study. Similar comments were made regarding lack of formal theoretical study in VE and of concomitant gaps in music theory knowledge in the HE course. The lack of preparation in academic and music theory areas meant that participants had to work very hard to 'catch up' and 'keep up' with learning areas and materials. For all of these students, the transition between

VE and HE music courses could, and perhaps should have been 'smoother'. The curricula and pedagogies of the courses were not viewed as being aligned. Cora summed up this unpreparedness for HE studies exclaiming:

'They could have prepared us better for those years in VE. Suddenly we were reading articles and doing essays and getting penalties for late work. There was none of that in TAFE. We should have been warned. The transition was crazy – everyone was complaining. It was like *Surprise – welcome to the degree!*'

HE music graduate students had been challenged by a third year music composition unit that explored approaches and repertoire of 20th century postmodern music. Perceptions were illustrative of the misalignment of VE and HE curriculum and pedagogy. Participants felt the subject was 'not relevant' to their music study or practice. Iggy confessed that he and the other students 'had no idea what the unit was about'. Students struggled to understand highly complex approaches to composition and the postmodern repertoire requiring a very high level understanding of theoretical and structural concepts. They also struggled with the pedagogical style of the lecturer in this subject, who focused on score analysis and critical listening. Students were not directed to use compositional approaches to create their own music but rather merely studied other (what they may well have been perceived as better, or more famous) musical works. The lecturer presented pre-prepared lectures and allowed no discussion or questioning. Students felt disconnected from the lecturer and the subject material. Myers (2008, p. 4) argued that music curricular and pedagogical systems and conditions that do not connect with 'intuitive inclinations...and inherent musical capacities' result in students who 'drop out...or 'tune out'. Certainly my participants appeared to be voting with their ears...

Students in the HE 2 cohort admitted unfamiliarity with basic academic skills like critical reading and analysis of texts. Cora felt 'scared' by the prospect of researching and writing an academic dissertation on music because she had 'no idea how to read and analyse (academic) texts'. In fact, many students appeared to have little time or inclination for any kind of reading, let alone that required for academic work.

Such experiences however were in contrast to those participants who had experienced prior substantial and high quality music education. Participants such as Kyrie, Iggy, Effie Ben and Dylan all undertook formal music training either at High Schools with well-regarded music curricula or through AMEB exams. They arrived at tertiary music (both VE then HE) with starkly different music habitus and higher levels of music capital. This appeared to alter their experience of the music curriculum, particularly in the areas of 'formalised' music education, such as music theory. Furthermore, those who possessed higher musical knowledge and skills were able to readily identify the lack of music capital in others. Those with higher levels of music skills and knowledge not only reported fewer challenges in coping with formal areas of the tertiary music curriculum such as music theory, but also exhibited a sense of confidence and competence in negotiating these aspects of the curriculum. Unsurprisingly these participants reported little anxiety or fear in tackling the theoretical and formalistic areas of the curriculum.

7.4.2. Practical habitus developed in Vocational Education field

For many participants the VE and HE sectors, and courses were 'completely different'. The VE course was seen as focusing on music performance and the 'more practical' aspects of music whereas Kyrie missed the reduced time and place for 'playing' in the HE course. The HE course involved 'the theory of music and the academic side of things' whereas the VE course did not attend to academic foundational skills and adopted a practical pedagogical approach to music theory. It is clear that students identified VE music studies as prioritising music making (function) whereas the HE course tended to prioritise music learning (form).

The relevant nomenclature associated with different educational sectors is indicative of the relative notions of legitimisation. Recalling Bourdieu's (1986, p. 97) discussions of hierarchies of disciplines within the wider education field, Higher Education is distinguishable from Vocational Education. HE is positioned as 'higher' education, in contrast to, VE which is *not* higher, but rather 'vocational'. Vocational, in the educational hierarchical structures, refers to notions of function, doing and making. Whereas the 'higher' form of education is

connoted with learning for the sake of learning (rather than for necessity or utilitarianism). This is reminiscent of Bourdieu's distinctions in work type, ethic and disposition between the proletarian labourer and bourgeois academic. VE is positioned as the field preparing workers for work whereas HE (re)produces the learner for learning and the teacher, for teaching.

Perceived differences between the two sectors extended to pedagogical and cultural areas. VE teaching was described as 'loose' and 'cruisy', indicative of relatively low levels of academic achievement, work ethic and musical prowess. Ben recalled that the VE culture just seemed 'less serious' in comparison to his two years of HE study. HE teaching was seen to be more organised, ordered and involved explicit expectations of demonstrated learning outcomes. Iggy concluded that (in the HE course), more (was expected) from performance, writing, theory, everything.' Students judged that the VE course had accommodated a wider range of popular and contemporary music styles, whereas the HE course seemed to direct students towards a narrower, more Jazz focused, repertoire of music.

The different sectors tended to cater differently for different habitus. The VE sector better responded to the practical, functional music backgrounds of students by creating and promoting a space and place where students could engage in the styles of music they preferred in more familiar, unconstrained and flexible circumstances. The HE field tended to favour a more formulaic engagement with music teaching that many participants' habitus were not aligned with.

VE students transitioning from VE to HE experienced a great deal of anxiety, stress and even anger due the challenges they faced in meeting the alternative academic and cultural circumstances of Higher Education. Unsurprisingly, at times (particularly in the early stages of HE studies) this impacted negatively on their sense of well-being and enjoyment of studying music. Pitts (2002, p. 76) claimed it was:

'Not surprising that the move from school to university, with its changes of institutional conventions as well as personal circumstances, places

demands upon new students who may already be wavering in their self-belief.'

The misalignment of habitus with field, coupled with low levels of music capital, were causal links for feelings of alienation, disillusionment and misplacement. The cultural and educational clashes that occur when habitus, cultural capital and field are misaligned are associated with rejection and a feeling of exclusion. Marginalisation leads to perceptions that uninitiated agents are deliberately being kept 'at arm's length' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 26). Fields denying or delimiting the habitus of certain agents are, in effect, rejecting these individuals and their stories – stories that detail the disposition of preferences, experiences and characteristics of individuals. Voices once heard become silenced. Like students in the HE 1 cohort, HE 2 students strained to 'catch up' because they were never really 'ready' in the first place. Feelings of anxiety and displacement grew from growing suspicions that they did not belong in these learning environments. Struggles with curriculum and pedagogy arose from deficits in music capital - of *not* knowing what they perhaps felt they *ought* to have known.

Despite their own tensions and challenges, some of the HE 2 participants were surprised by other students' even more limited academic and music foci and capacities. Finn was disappointed that some students didn't take the opportunities to discover other musical ideas and styles but rather 'just kept on doing the same things they had always done'. Some were challenged by students who were actively disinterested in subject material or didn't even try to understand the relevance of a particular unit. Kyrie remembered one student who said they 'hated' music history and thought the teacher was an 'idiot'.

7.4.3. Agency and institutional power

Feelings of inadequacy stemming from limited music capital and an understanding of the formulaic aspects of music led to reduced agency and disconnection in students. HE 2 participants felt powerless to manage the discrepancies between what they *did* or *were* and what they were expected to know. Despite a habitus that involved a love of music and dispositions to pursue, play and make music in post-secondary studies, many students felt incapable of changing their situation, no matter how much they might try to

achieve the learning. Anxiety and other problematic emotional and psychological phenomena were inextricably linked to this sense of powerlessness. Freer (2008) found significant levels of anxiety in secondary school music students who were expected to undertake tasks requiring greater music skills and knowledge than they possessed. Of note also is that these tasks were directed by music teachers and involved little autonomy of behalf of the students.

A large proportion of music units were taught by sessional staff; a reflection of the university sector's growing reliance on casual staff and reduction in permanent staff ratios. Although students generally valued the contributions of sessional staff they struggled with the nature and level of engagement of sessional staff. Participants complained that sessional staff 'were not around' when needed and 'did not feel like part of the course or the same as (full time) staff'. Students appeared not to understand the conditions and limitations of sessional teaching and were frustrated that these teachers were not always, or indeed very often, available. Despite the best efforts of all parties, sessional staff often remained unaware or confused by academic and administrative processes such as timetabling, assessment and enrolments. Students recognised that sessional staff members sometimes appeared unaware of wider course and institutional procedures that lay outside of the specific areas of their teaching. Students were frustrated by the inconsistencies that sometimes flowed from these disconnections. HE 2 participants struggled to understand how such a high ratio of sessional staff could be justified by the university. Whilst some understood that high sessional staffing ratios were due to financial issues, they also acknowledged that it appeared they were powerless to improve the situation. Isabelle claimed that the university 'should offer teaching that is full time, not part time'.

HE 2 music students experienced further frustrations as they attempted to negotiate the myriad of institutional administrative and academic processes related to their study. Participants who did not comply with or successfully complete these procedures often experienced negative consequences. Students attended and completed all assessment for units but later found out that they were not properly enrolled in the unit or had been the subjects of

'administrative errors'. Students who struggled to understand and comply with the complexities of plagiarism, or the distinction between collaboration and collusion found themselves facing academic penalties. Some found instructions for administrative and academic procedures confusing and unclear or 'difficult to navigate'. HE systems and procedures differed from VE administrative arrangements and presented a whole new paradigm to be learned. Participants manifested a sense of passiveness in the face of institutional administrative demands and many felt resigned to processes they struggled to comply with, let alone change to suit individual choices or activities.

The issue of time emerged as a strong theme from the HE 2 cohort data analysis. Students complained there was too little time allocated within the curriculum to attain all the skills and knowledge required. Both individual units and the overarching curriculum were seen to provide limited or insufficient time to attain explicit learning outcomes. Kyrie described the content to time ratio of the Music Materials unit (a subject devised to collapse the previously separate areas of theory, aural training and transcription) as 'crazy'. Students in particular felt that important and fundamental areas of the curriculum such as music theory and performance 'needed much more time' allocated for teaching and learning. Some concluded that the course should be longer and others commented that the semesters (at twelve weeks, making for a total of twenty four weeks for an academic year) were 'too short - especially as we have so much to learn!' Iggy felt at least an extra year was required to adequately take on all that was required of the second and third year of the Bachelor of Music course. In fact Iggy felt that, whilst the TAFE course provided a good entrance point into university studies, the Diploma program 'did not make up for the first year equivalence of the degree...'

Participants were bemused that course contact hours shrank as they progressed through VE into HE study. Kyrie concluded that more hours ought to be allocated as students progressed, because 'there's more you need to ask and know in later years, not less...' There was a feeling that knowledge content across the course was 'crammed in'. Challenges with time constraints led to widespread feelings of anxiety. Kyrie summed up such feelings declaring that their studies felt 'rushed, frantic and stressful'. Students were frustrated and

angry when university wide course restructuring saw core music curriculum condensed into fewer units, electives cut or delivery hours reduced. They complained - to each other mostly, sometimes to teachers, but only ever within the confines of the music department - about the lack of consultation, the inconsistent or missing rationale for such decisions and the negative consequences for their studies. Students were either reluctant to take concerns to senior members of the university or were unaware of how they might go about it. Students appeared resigned to being unable to challenge of change these decisions.

Participants were however acutely aware that in order to learn music effectively they needed to be able to do so at a slow, steady and personal pace. This kind of teaching and learning was severely limited or curtailed by ongoing institutional rationalisations (and the associated economic parameters) resulting in severely reduced opportunity, space and time for extended practice and reflection. Institutional learning conditions and limitations were explored by Johansen (2009, p. 36) who concluded that:

‘although the concept of effectiveness within education politics concerns how fast something can be learned, effectiveness in higher music education is also attached to what strategies lead to the best results, regardless of time.’

Participants were continuously, and conversely, confronted with the apparent irony of the institutional narrative that claimed that students wanted more qualifications in less time, whilst these students clearly indicated a desire and need for more time for learning. Johansen (2009, p. 36) was critical of institutional leaders who rely on policymakers’ to ‘know’ and ‘enforce’ ‘what is best’ particularly regarding generic, as opposed to a more specific approaches to tertiary music education. Johansen (2009, p. 36) referenced a number of large scale historical analyses of curriculum policies in tertiary institutions and concluded that such policies were ‘not implemented...with a high degree of fidelity.’

Tornqvist (2004, p. 235) has warned that creativity can be ‘destroyed(d)...through regulation and control’. Institutional processes related to

administrative and academic procedures and pedagogical limitations illustrate the constraining and formulaic nature and culture of the higher education field. My participants were frustrated by institutional academic and administrative limitations that were at odds with necessary conditions of flexibility and freedom for engaged music making and doing. Students reacted to reduced possibilities for creativity in 'environments where the free exchange of ideas is impeded' (Törnqvist, 2004, p. 241).

Frustration turned to disappointment and anger over a series of institutional decisions resulting in widespread negative implications on respondent experiences, their emotional wellbeing and levels of learning: a series of course and unit restructures; closure of the original campus delivering the music degree (Sunbury); discontinuation of that music degree, and; the remaining music curriculum (VE programs and HE music specialisation units) moved to other campuses with inadequate or unsuitable facilities.

The decision to close the Sunbury campus caused deep concern amongst the HE 2 cohort. These students commented that the decision seemed illogical and unplanned; particularly after 'so much time and money' had been spent establishing the facility. Those who disagreed with the decision to close the Sunbury campus claimed they had not been consulted and that their concerns had been ignored. George lamented that 'he felt powerless'. Students intending on completing the undergraduate music degree were shocked and upset by the university's decision to discontinue the course. George exclaimed that 'no-one wanted the course to close and I didn't get to finish my music degree'. Participants organised meetings and lobbied senior management not to go ahead with the decision, but, as Ben lamented 'no-one paid any attention'. Cora recalled how she and some other undergraduate students were engaged to perform at an official university function attended by several senior university staff. Cora composed herself and confronted a very senior member of the university, outlining the main student concerns and presenting a range of reasons for reversing the decision. Cora was incredulous that this person was seemingly unaware of the decision and simply patted her hand, smiled and turned to speak to someone else. Kyrie, Ben, Hung and other participants were extremely angry and upset at the decision. Their anger was summed up in

comments like: 'That (decision) wrecked the whole of my final year'; 'The University left us like sheep in a paddock to die'; and 'They (senior management) cleaned their hands of it (the decision to discontinue the course) and took no responsibility'. Finn was incensed:

'VU did not listen to us. Not a single person outside the music department came and spoke to us about why the course was closing or realistic plans about our future and I think this illustrates a complete lack of respect. Either they didn't care about the impacts on students or didn't care about us in the first place'

Students were completely disillusioned that their voices of protest were suppressed. Moore (2012, p. 68) has described 'fields' as 'areas of struggle for domination and power in which systems of hierarchy are contested or challenged.' The circumstances outlined by participants, in the face of adverse university decision making, appeared to endow participants with little to no power and resulted in complete domination by the senior management of the university. If, as Johansen (2009, p. 36) suggested, large and complex institutional fields involve 'predetermined hierarchical structures', then the participants in this study were clearly positioned at the bottom of this structure. Decisions were challenged to no effect. The game played out according to the rules of those possessing power to make decisions to the detriment of those subjected to the rules. Themes of reduced agency and muted voices were present in reactions to institutional decisions. Students experienced the institution as one which tried to 'restrain (and) control...' (Philo and Parr, 2000, p. 514). Participants disagreed with these decisions and were frustrated and angry that they lacked the capacity to effect change.

Azaola (2012) discussed the nature and social impacts of inadequate music education opportunities within poorer rural communities in Mexico, particularly in comparison with middle class areas. Azaola (2012) has argued vehemently for reconsiderations of the levels of educational resourcing and the expansion of music learning opportunities. She is certainly not alone in calling for substantial re-thinking about access to quality music education (see Hodges and Luehrsen, 2010, Lamont, 2011, Myers, 2008). The decision to close an undergraduate music degree at a 'University of Opportunity' in lower socioeconomic areas of

Melbourne led some students to infer that the university believed aspiring musicians from the West of Melbourne were undeserving of the opportunity to study music at a Higher Education level. Anger and bewilderment at these decisions were likely compounded by inadequate and under resourced music education experiences in primary and secondary contexts. My participants may well have queried whether they had the right to accrue the necessary music capital required to succeed and negotiate the music industry and music education fields. I would understand if decisions to limit, cut and deny music education opportunities at all levels led to these students to conclude that they were second class citizens.

Students negotiating the transition from VE to HE fields experienced a significant range of challenges associated with limited cultural (music) capital, misaligned habitus and the constraints and effects of institutional power. These challenges resulted in feelings of distress, anxiety, anger and, in some cases, acute senses of powerlessness.

7.5. Experiences across the cohorts

*'If I just had the room to stand
I'd walk away at my own command
Find my way back to the shore
Find my way back to the shore'*

['Back to the shore', The Mae Trio](#)

Participants in this study developed a passion for making, doing and engaging with music in a wide range of music community fields. Participants accrued limited music capital through initial exposure to cultural processes of legitimisation in music knowing. They chose and responded positively to informal community music fields where functional habitus of music was less constrained and where consequently a sense of agency and well-being was fostered.

Young people then chose to move from informal community music contexts to formal music education fields. Transition to these fields was accompanied by a series of challenges brought about by tensions in aligning practical and

functional habitus with the formality and legitimisation necessarily involved in the reproduction of music capital within the tertiary music education field. This tension caused anxiety and affected the nature of participant engagement with the field. As passive contestants in the hierarchical dynamics of the playing field, students experienced a sense of powerlessness as they were subjected to institutional decisions about what, how and when they should engage in music.

7.5.1. Habitus in the negotiation of formal music education fields

As has been discussed, most students commenced formal tertiary music study with limited, inadequate or no music capital due to limited access to or experience with formal, quality music education. Conversely, the participant habitus tended to emphasise enjoyment and celebration of the music experience - endless hours spent listening to favourite bands in bedrooms, scribbling lyrics and trialling melodies in band spaces and hanging out at gigs and festivals. Participants focused not on measuring the tempo or counting the beat but rather 'just played' and even though the bands might have occasionally been 'terrible' the sense of enjoyment and exhilaration was profound.

Students faced the constant struggle of always having to *make up time*, invoking the musical elements of tempo and rhythm. Students possessed an established sense of musical groove but were out of step with institutional rhythms. They felt (left) *behind* and had to *catch up* due to knowledge they ought to have learned, but did not, prior to engaging in formal music study. Many respondents felt they had to learn more to make up for these deficiencies. The remedial work left them feeling as though there was never enough time or that they were always 'out of time'. What little time remained was spent learning the form of music rather than engaging with practical music applications. The result was further constraint on participant habitus that forsook external music making and activities (function) to learn the form of music, as legitimated musical knowledge.

Bourdieu (1986, p. 64) argued that cultural capital was most easily and effectively accrued by 'those who can take their time'. Those with sufficient economic status were able to allocate time to learn to know and understand art and culture (but who ironically, by virtue of more aligned habitus, needed *less*

time to appreciate...) The student habitus in this study was characterised by economic self-support, part time work, semi-professional musicianship and casual teaching. Such habitus resulted in less time to learn, know and understand. The perceptions of limited or insufficient time allocated to study were related to the level of skills and knowledge many entered study with. Time tended to be experienced differently depending on the verisimilitudes of context and personal experience. Habitus, manifesting as backgrounds, choices and circumstances, and limited music capital were significant factors in the participant experiences of mismatched music rhythms and tempos.

Constrained and incompatible habitus impacted on enjoyment and well-being. Intersections between informal music backgrounds and lack of confidence in formal tertiary music study have been noted by researchers in the UK (Burland and Pitts, 2007, Creech et al., 2008, Papageorgi et al., 2010); Brazil (Feichas, 2010) and Ireland (Moore, 2012). Much of the international research into the tertiary music student experience, including investigations of associated anxieties and self-perceived unpreparedness, has taken place within 'first choice' universities where entrance requirements and expectations of commencing students were relatively high. A participant from one research study, undertaken at a highly regarded tertiary music institution, reported that the entrance exam 'appeared to assume greater knowledge of theory than I had ever been exposed to in my exams...' (Moore, 2012). If students with substantial music skills and knowledge begin their university music education with surprise and anxiety, it must have been all the more confronting for my participants who began study with significantly less music capital.

My vignettes (presented in Chapter 5) explored, amongst other aspects, the notion of participant habitus being in a tense alignment with music education fields. The story, All that Jazz highlighted the kinds of anxiety and lack of agency resulting from student background/habitus misaligned to the curricular and pedagogical conditions of a tertiary music course. John's opinions of Jazz were tied to a fundamental lack of comprehension, rather than a pure dislike, of the genre. In this sense he was 'excluded' in the same way that some of Bourdieu's respondents were when asked to respond to 'modern pictures' – replying 'I don't understand it' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 35). John's challenges with

his music education were attributable to struggles in comprehending, fitting into and belonging to this specific, legitimated 'universe of works of arts and its history' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 36). John's scholastic and music background was not aligned to the curriculum of the tertiary music institution. John was *not* one of those students, as Mills asserts (2008, p. 80) whose 'habitus...resemble more closely the values that the school seeks to transmit consciously (and unconsciously) and legitimate'. John, as an enthusiast of popular music entered the formal tertiary music environment with 'low status knowledge' (Feichas, 2010, p. 51).

But John also experienced concentration on certain styles of music as 'irrelevant' to his background and preferences. Myers (2008, p 4) stated 'the absence of such relevance in music is perceived by students as implicit affirmation that they lack musical talent' and that 'unsuccessful students assume the problem is theirs, and they may begin a lifetime of music education avoidance'. Likewise, John nearly dropped out and may well have avoided future music education because he assumed that he was not good enough.

John's aversion to music theory and 'the whole classroom thing' was illustrative of a wider disparity between skills and knowledge attained at an outer western suburbs High School and the academic expectations of a tertiary music course. Burland and Pitts (2007) found a widespread lack of confidence in basic academic skills, such as essay writing and research methods, in first year students beginning undergraduate music degrees. Maria, the protagonist in the story *Eat your greens* poignantly exposes the impact of insufficient educational capital in undertaking tertiary study and more particularly, the way that lower academic status can negatively impact on the study of music in a tertiary environment. Maria's relatively low academic capital had not prepared her to meet the academic expectations of the tertiary music field. This inconsistency led to a great deal of anxiety and discomfort for Maria. It is also interesting to note that the misalignment of habitus and field came as a complete surprise to the student. Pitts (2002) found that meeting academic requirements was amongst the myriad of challenges of musicians entering formal music education fields. Tertiary institutions have tended to maintain a status quo in relation to

academic approaches and standards despite acknowledging that social status is often related to (deficit) writing and academic skills (Read et al., 2001).

Tom, the student in the in *The DJ* vignette, struggled to meet the basic requirements of attending class and finding time for study outside of class. Tom's habitus involved late nights, dance parties and the cultural accoutrements that typically accompanied such activities. Attending to university expectations meant either changing his musical habitus or leaving the field because the constraint on lifestyle choices was too much to bear. Further, Tom's musical dispositions involved preference for a style of music that was simply not accommodated by the curriculum. Ken, in *Did you hear the one about the drummer?*, also came to the field of study with a habitus that involved a large amount of playing music. Much of what formal music study expected of Ken was antithetical to Ken's experience of and preference for music making and doing. Ken's lack of enjoyment and engagement with study was attributable to fundamentally constrained choices to the musical self. Ken experienced formal music study as series of academic, formulaic and institutional restrictions on what and how Ken wanted to play *his* music.

In *What's the matter with Gillian?* the student's request to undertake an external music composition course suggested that her popular song writing habitus was not being accommodated. Similarly, student complaints about the focus of a theoretical analysis of art music in composition units, in the story '*I just don't get it*', were the result of not having preferences for practical approaches to contemporary music styles acknowledged. These stories highlighted direct constraints on participant habitus, experienced as restrictions on musical creativity. Popular music habitus defined largely by music making 'becomes something other than itself' (Wright, 2008, p. 50) when subjected to formal learning (about) music. Student dispositions for *producing* music were inhibited by the tertiary field's modus operandi to *reproduce* (legitimate) musical knowledge. Bourdieu's (1986, p. 60) assertion that the education field strives to impart 'precepts, formulae, instead of relying on improvisation' is perfectly apt in describing the competing acts of making (or producing) music, on one hand, and knowing about (or reproducing music and/or music knowledge), on the other.

The story, *I just don't get it* also highlighted the dissonance and rejection of tonality explored as musical attributes of avant-garde art music, for example through the works of Arnold Schoenberg, heard by students as alien and threatening. Students were accustomed to popular music usually conforming to standard musical expectations of consonance in tonality and rhythm. Complaints and resistance played out in an analogous juxtaposition between the use of dissonance in avant-garde art music and the dissonance of a student habitus misaligned to the curriculum. The students' musical preferences sounded dissonant when heard within the institutional score. Underlying tensions between curriculum, pedagogy and student backgrounds produced *disconcerting* sounds, lacking in harmony.

Question and answer explored frustration and student disconnection with music studies despite positive intentions expressed during the application process. The process of student selection allowed for only a very brief and surface examination of students' backgrounds and preferences. Potential students often appeared to have very little real understanding of the music curriculum they were about to tackle, nor for the way music was to be taught. Students appeared to assume that studying music would be similar to their experiences in informal pre tertiary contexts. The combination of an unexplored habitus and misguided assumptions about the nature of tertiary music study resulted in the tense alignment of habitus and field. Institutional pressures to increase student load were brought about by heightened competitiveness within the tertiary education sector. This arguably resulted in students whose habitus was not closely aligned to the field being admitted at any rate. It is unsurprising that tensions arose and manifested in a range of disconnected and disruptive behaviours, which brought about further challenges for other students.

The juggler explored similar anxieties in negotiating the academic tertiary field. The story explored my anxiety and uncertainty about being an academic in an arts faculty of a university. My habitus involved a love and familiarity with a range of music styles and experiences: school boy choirs; youth orchestras; performing with bands and ensembles; song writing and composing; and, of course, listening to, loving, savouring and devouring music. I had accrued relatively high levels of educational capital with law, arts and music study at

undergraduate and post graduate level. However I entered higher education academic *teaching* as a doctoral *student*, having previously taught as a music teacher in the VE sector and as a lecturer at a music conservatorium. I lacked fundamental research experience, skills and knowledge, as well as the expected minimum academic qualifications of a university academic. Like other participants, the level of capital I possessed was limited, and this affected my experiences within the field, while my habitus as a musician became constrained by my career as a music academic. Like many of my students, my anxiety, so evident in the frenzied, worried, emotive and undulating writing, stemmed, in part, from the misalignments between habitus and cultural (academic) capital and the field of academia.

It is worth noting here the inherent paradox between (music) communities that provide places and spaces for the communal enjoyment of creative work and institutional (music) contexts which often result in subjective and private activity. These distinctions can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation; challenges highlighted by many of the participants in this study. Discussion in the previous chapter highlighted how communities allowed a development of personal agency. Habitus remained relatively unconstrained through choice of levels and modes of musical activities and a prioritisation of the practical, or functional, aspects of music making. Conversely, fields that constrained the musical habitus (such as High School music programs or communities that failed to support personal agency and choice) were viewed in a negative light.

Constrained and inconsistent habitus in formal music education fields tended to limit and challenge the accrual of music capital. If 'capital (is) a term used by Bourdieu to denote power' (Stakelum, 2008, p. 93) then difficulties in accruing musical knowledge and understanding also equated to challenges to student agency. This significant phenomenon is discussed further in this chapter.

7.5.2. The role of form in institutional music education fields

All students involved in this research experienced various challenges associated with negotiating the formulaic aspects of tertiary music fields. As has been noted, their habitus was rooted firmly within the function and practice of music. Much music making prior to university had taken place in a range of

informal community fields where the function of music was prioritised over learning of and engaging with the form of music and where social structures were less organised than formal tertiary music education fields. It is unsurprising, therefore, that participants in this study struggled to learn how music worked, sounded and looked within the formulaic pedagogical processes and culture of an institutional environment. Moore (2012, p. 67) described this transition as:

‘...students’ musical habituses which can be dynamic and fluid prior to higher education are bound by the structures of the music department when they enter college.’

Participants’ difficulty with music theory study was illustrative of the more generic challenge of negotiating the formulaic doxa common in tertiary education. There existed a great deal of resistance, anxiety and fear to the study of music theory as part of tertiary music studies. Music theory can be seen as an embodiment of the notion of understanding and knowing ‘form’ in music. The habitus of all participants involved a close connection, and love for, the function of music whereas only a few participants had developed an awareness or understanding of the form of music.

Much of Bourdieu’s work focused on the ‘primacy of form over function’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 172). Participant habitus was almost exclusively based upon prior music and music education activities that focused on the functional and performative aspects of music. Whilst few had experienced substantial or high quality music education prior to entering the institutional environment, all had enjoyed many and varied practical experiences with music. Involvement with particularly informal music communities (such as bands, scenes, groups of friends), is tied to the dichotomous structural characteristics of communities, which promote enjoyment in the doing or making of music as opposed to formal, organised or institutional music contexts which tend to focus on the knowing and understanding of music. For Bourdieu’s (1986, p. 25) (un)cultured participants, cultural activity was undertaken for enjoyment and participation. This contrasted to the cultured aesthete who viewed cultural activity and product by ‘displacing the interest from the content...to the form’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 26), perhaps somewhat similarly to institutional tendencies to

emphasise structures (or buildings) over substance (or the people who work and study in buildings).

The elevated position of form in the tertiary institutional music field is tied firmly to the notion that legitimate musicianship rests upon a thorough understanding and appreciation of traditional and accepted music forms and structures. The acceptance of such approaches to music education has seen emphasis placed upon music appreciation and analysis, and the academic approach to music study, in music education generally (see Papageorgi et al., 2010, Cook, 1990, Lamont, 2011, Wright, 2008). Indeed, Moore (2012, p. 67) argued that pedagogical insistence on the appreciation of musical form ‘highlights an assumption that knowledge and skills associated with the western classical tradition (music literacy) are superior to that of popular music (aurally based)’. The notion of appreciation can be understood in the context of Bourdieu’s (1986) theories of cultural capital whereby, for example the ability to appreciate form in music operates as a kind of code breaking skill only attainable by successful accrual of formal music knowledge offered at formal music education institutions.

Ruismaki and Tarja (2008) found that music students identified singing and playing music as the most enjoyable part of music education. However, in contrast, students highlighted music theory components of lessons (reading and learning notation) as the least enjoyable. Music students entering the formal music education fields with popular music habitus tend to prefer music *making* in familiar genres to *learning about* new styles of music such as Classical or Jazz (Creech et al., 2008, Burt and Mills, 2006). Participants in my research had strong preferences for music making and doing accompanied by a resistance to the theoretical or formulaic aspects of music. Such attitudes illustrate a habitus that simultaneously positions the ‘substance of the work’ (Bourdieu 1977, p. 25) in the foreground whilst challenging the analysis of music by pushing ‘the thing (musical work) into the background’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 35). The use of formal music pedagogical models for the study of popular music styles and practice have attracted criticism (Wright, 2008, Lebler, 2007, Lebler, 2008), in part, because traditional approaches to teaching have tended to prioritise musical *form* over musical *function*, or the abstract over the actual (Louth, 2012).

Students in other research have also censured the curricular foci on theory and analysis of music as both difficult to understand and unconnected to their interests and backgrounds (Moore, 2012). Interestingly, Mantie (2013) highlighted how students use music *making* as a way of dealing with the stress of the academic, or formulaic, aspects of tertiary music study.

Vignettes exploring my observations of student engagement with formal music study highlight a series of challenges students faced negotiating the formulaic aspects of learning music. In the story, *Above and beyond* a sessional teacher and I struggled to accommodate the institutional requirement to teach music theory in a generic and formulaic way that conformed to wider institutional curricular structures. In turn, students struggled to complete the required learning within the strictly defined curricular and pedagogical framework. In *! just don't get it* students resisted parts of the curriculum that emphasised a highly formulaic approach to composition and other units that focused on academic and theoretical aspects of music. Some students felt that having to analyse the form and structure of music, rather than listening to, playing or music would 'destroy' the 'magic' of the music.

In the story *All that Jazz* John admitted that he had always struggled with the form and structure of music. John was like many students who had struggled to engage with or understand the relevance and importance of the 'theoretical aspects' of music in music education. In *The party* an exasperated Mick struggled to understand the criteria used to measure the quality of performance and more generally with a pedagogical approach that rewarded musical form and technique over the performance and function of music. Ken, the drummer in *Did you hear the one about the drummer?*, struggled with the rules and processes of the institutional field. My explanation to Ken that such formulaic aspects were all part of the academic process of becoming 'qualified' echoed as the channelled voice of hierarchical authority.

The juggler explored time constraints and of balancing substantial, and often conflicting, institutional demands. The vignette elicited anxieties related to my capacity within the allowances of time to achieve all that is expected of an academic in University life. This paralleled students' apprehensions about their readiness for work and struggles to meet the significant demands of being

successful students with busy and full lives. My story explored the challenges faced in institutional contexts, of constraints imposed and the effects such limits have on meeting or exceeding expectations. Students also struggled to meet their own learning expectations, as well as those of their teachers and the industry, due to limitations placed on them through institutional processes. Feichas (2010, p. 50) noted that educational environments tended to be characterised by 'a defined curriculum, within an organised and structured context...and where rules and traditions for teaching are formalised'. The students and I were challenged by the imposition of regulations such as time constraints in curricular duration and structure.

Participant challenges with formulaic elements of music education highlighted the problematic inconsistency between the desire to play, on one hand, and the need to understand how to play, on the other. Discussing pedagogical approaches in music creativity, Louth (2012, p. 10) referred to improvisation as the 'paradoxical relationship between the freedom of musical expression associated with the act, and the restriction that necessarily accompanies stylistic parameters...' This description is applicable to the wider music education field where students, music educators and institutions struggle to balance 'rules with freedom' (Louth, 2012, p. 10).

7.5.3. Legitimation in formal music education fields

The wider educational field, including tertiary music education, creates and perpetuates a process of legitimisation. Specific (legitimate) skills and knowledge are reproduced for and by agents passing through the field in the form of cultural (music) capital, including the ability to 'recognise legitimate works' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 18). The dynamics of the tertiary institutional field create a process of legitimisation for students in the form of the successful reproduction of legitimated (music) skills and knowledge (capital). This then is 'the taste for legitimate works' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 8). Graduating students are then qualified (or 'legitimated') to participate in further fields equipped with the necessary (legitimate) capital to succeed in those fields, including entering the profession of music education.

Processes of legitimacy involve complex classifications of more and less accepted knowledge and cultural capital leading to hierarchical taxonomies. For example, the culture and process of determining hierarchies of educational institutions can be contextualised within the themes of cultural capital and field. Those institutions that are judged best able to replicate and reproduce the knowledge and culture most highly valued by society are by extension those institutions that are conceived to be of the highest value, or the most legitimate. The ranking of universities, in an increasingly competitive global tertiary environment (or 'market, as it now often referred to), is becoming more common and more important (or *valuable*) within the tertiary education field. Processes of legitimisation situate research undertaken in institutions that sit atop educational hierarchies as more valuable or relevant than research undertaken in more lowly ranked institutions. Hierarchical classifications are extended to research subjects (medical over, say, music education) and methodologies (quantitative as opposed to qualitative). Researchers, teachers and students from 'lower status' institutions, and the qualifications they grant and earn, attract lower assessments of legitimacy.

The tertiary music institution places constraints on habitus through the process of legitimisation and reproduction of dominant educational (in this case, musical) knowledge. Bourdieu (1986, p. 8) found that 'popular taste' was most often found amongst participants who possessed the least, or lowest education experience or qualifications. Similarly the participants in my research tended to have relatively low levels of music education capital but had 'learned' to appreciate various styles of popular music in a range of community contexts. Habitus that included passion and energy and the musical idiosyncrasies of students, did not, however, equate to legitimisation, particularly within educational fields. Music knowledge needed to be first taught, and then measured for students to be legitimate. Those who had passed music tests (VCE, AMEB etc) were seen, and identified as, better (more legitimate) musicians. This led to a hierarchical distinction between illegitimate 'musicality... something innate and personal (on one hand), whilst to be a musician (on the other) involves the social and cultural acquisition of (legitimate) status (Pitts, 2002).

Mick's pointed questions, outlined in the story *The party*, suggested challenges with the use of formal assessment processes that resulted in some students' performative skills being formally judged as more legitimate than others. The vignette highlighted at least one student's struggle to accept or understand the whole process of objectively validating musical practice. Tensions arising in teaching and measuring the creative pursuit of music making illustrated the tensions between form and substance in music. Pitts (2002, 2003) , inter alia, explored the reliance and insistence upon assessment procedures and the negative effects such formulaic measurements could have on student engagement and self-confidence. It is beyond the scope of the current discussion to engage with wider debates about the measuring of art (Anderson, 2005, Freer, 2008) but such considerations certainly extend and elucidate this current discussion.

Stress and tensions associated with the requirements of evaluating performance publically in tertiary music education are common. Pullman (2010) found widespread lack of self-confidence and personal anxiety in students at three different music courses in the UK. *My (not so) funny valentine* told the story of a female student suffering crippling performance anxiety. The vignette described the institutional requirement that music performance skills needed to be formally and publically judged in order to be declared legitimate. Viewed through the lens of cultural reproduction, this public assessment of music skills can be seen as a process of legitimisation of cultural (music) capital. Pass grades in such assessment circumstances, as an integral part of becoming 'qualified' musicians, are the equivalent of being awarded a ticket to the show, a pass that allows the successful student entry into the next stage of the musical journey. Ironically, this formal process of legitimisation turns the vocation, or 'calling' (Pellegrino, 2011, p. 84) of music into (merely) a career (Lamont, 2011).

Melanie, the main protagonist in *My (not so) funny valentine*, appeared to exhibit a bodily reaction, or resistance, to this process of legitimisation. As Bourdieu (1986, p. 73) noted 'Art is a bodily thing, and music...is perhaps the most corporeal' and 'deeply rooted within the body'. In the story, Melanie's body refused to voice the words of the song perhaps in an unconscious act of refusal to play the game of legitimisation. Performance anxiety could be characterised

as a manifestation of the great challenges with the authenticating of music. This suggests a reason why so many performers experience 'more than just nerves' when it comes to public performance; the process might be experienced as the ultimate evaluation of their (musical) selves. By extension performance anxiety may function as an acute version of more generalised anxieties expressed by music students.

John's High School experiences in the story, *All that Jazz*, detailed his familiarity with and love of a specific contemporary music style (in this case 'Progressive Rock'). However, this music style fell outside the repertoire, or canon, of music styles expected to be studied in the music education course. John perhaps understandably inferred that because 'his' style of music was not included or even mentioned, that Progressive Rock was of lesser value or quality than Jazz or other more 'accepted' styles of music. John's choice of music did not conform to legitimate taste. John appeared to have sensed this, hence the choice not to perform, or even engage with 'his' music in the institutional environment. In the context of educational environments Progressive Rock belonged in the realms of popular taste and as such did not sit comfortably with the 'artistic' foci of a tertiary music course. Indeed it is difficult to see how Progressive Rock might be included in the highly exclusive categories of 'serious' music that exist as part of the traditional, and legitimising, landscapes of contemporary music curriculum and pedagogy (Gould, 2012, Moore, 2012, Wright, 2008).

In *What's the matter with Gillian* it is possible that the protagonist's demeanour was in fact a kind of passive/aggressive resistance to the process of legitimisation. Gillian's pointed questions possibly hinted at her suspicion of the authenticity of music education processes. The student's questioning of music credentials indirectly queried my legitimacy as a teacher. In this way Gillian was exploring independent or alternative notions of pedagogical legitimacy rather than simply accepting that staff engaged by the institution to teach music would be necessarily be able to do so. Gillian's request to learn the subject of music arranging her way, for her sake, was a direct attempt to circumvent the validity of institutional dictation in this area of the curriculum. My concern that Gillian's lack of engagement might be in part due to the curriculum was perhaps

illustrative of my concerns about the relative appropriateness of a course I had a large stake in. Tom's character in *The DJ* similarly illustrated how musical and life styles were not recognised or supported by the higher education curricula and culture. Electronic music and the cultural scene it embodied were incompatible with institutional cultures and processes. International research has highlighted many fields where, similarly, certain student habitus and cultural associations have been excluded or ignored (Moore, 2012, Stakelum, 2008, Wright, 2008, Valenzuela and Codina, 2014).

I just don't get it explored how composition units employed the analysis of legitimate works of art (in this case post-modern 'art music') to explore approaches to composition. Student resistance to the curriculum, and the teacher who both espoused but also represented this canonical repertoire, embodied a deep suspicion and rejection of legitimate music. Description of this music as 'wanky' represented at least one student's attempt to challenge the notion of 'high art'. Resentment may also have flowed from the lack of curricular emphasis on 'student' music, implying 'their' music was not legitimate. Resistance to other areas of the curriculum, particularly those focusing on 'academic' or analytical areas of music, were arguably borne out of opposition to the process of valuing some forms of musical knowledge, or doing, above others. These feelings may have mirrored 'The Y13 boy whose main interest was in music technology (but who) appeared to accept the fact that this was not recognised in school, and those who had formed their own pop or rock bands saw a similar separation between their study within the curriculum and their experiences outside it' (Pitts, 2009, p. 46). The rejection of 'art' music by the participants in this study was similar to students in Rimmer's (2010, p. 267) study whose 'rejection of school music thus paralleled their disavowal of the bases of school's status-allocating and legitimizing functions (its' doxa)'.

The juggler also examined notions of legitimacy in the tertiary field, particularly from my perspective as music teacher and academic. The story highlighted how the tertiary institutional field can create a process of legitimisation for staff in the form of minimum qualifications and other academic expectations such as a research profile. The story exposed my concerns that the valuable knowhow, experience, knowledge and teaching capacities of less qualified academics

positioned them behind those winning ‘the race for academic qualifications’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 127). The vignette detailed anxiety and my desire for acceptance as a worthy member of the academic staff. In fact still, now, I sit and write, striving to complete this thesis, in order to be qualified, to finally achieve the legitimacy of an academic profile. I do so with a fear and anxiety that I am too slow and too tired to complete it all. Perhaps my time will run out? I worry that while the thesis remains merely in progress, unfinished, I remain unqualified. I worry about if and when I finish, what hurdle will next be placed before me to clear? I remain anxious that I may always be somehow deficient as a lecturer and researcher in the university field, forever *illegitimate*. I fear I’ll be exposed. I realise that I too suffer from performance anxiety perhaps like Melanie, except that the stage takes the form of the classroom, faculty lounge and office...

Struggles with the expectations of academia, such as time constraints, misaligned backgrounds, skill sets and overall capacities to succeed have been explored (Pelias, 2003, LeBlanc, 2003). Teacher/researcher anxieties associated with challenges negotiating academic fields have also been linked to fears of inadequacy or the impostor phenomenon (Clance and Imes, 1978, Dancy li and Brown li, 2011, Hutchins, 2015). Academics who suffer from feelings of fraud and lack of confidence are certainly distinguished from Bourdieu’s (1986, p. 49) ‘self-assured cultural nobility’.

Despite a multitude of challenges with the process of legitimacy at play in the institutional music field, participants continued to struggle through in an attempt to achieve such legitimacy. I, and perhaps other ‘imposter’ academics, do also. Mai’s arduous and time consuming journey (narrated in *It’s a long road*) illustrated the lengths so many of us all go to make the grade. Mai’s travel story is allegorical of the protracted journey, the long and winding road we all take to become legitimate students, teachers and musicians.

7.5.4. Power dynamics in the institutional environment

The insistence on form and legitimacy and the tendency to constrain habitus within formal music education coalesce to act as modes of control. Power dynamics in the field see those highest in the social order (the educational

hierarchy) create and implement the curricula and pedagogy, as a means of order and restraint. Processes of legitimacy and formalising also result in powerlessness in agents lower in the educational order and of constraints to habitus. Creativity is negatively affected in the accrual of a very narrow and limited cultural (music) capital. Gould (2012) proposed that music education uses music curriculum and pedagogy to stabilise and manage creativity. The author draws on the notion of the Deluzian refrain (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) to analogise restrictive and repetitive music educational content and teaching as a stable and predictable musical chorus that educators sing/teach in an endless repetitive cycle.

Participants struggled with limited and constrained agency in the decision making process, and with the consequences of these decisions in their negotiation of the field. In institutional decision making student and staff voices were muted, suppressed or ignored. These challenges were directly related to power relations (dynamics) in the tertiary institutional field. A musical analogy can be drawn between the dynamics of music and the dynamics of the music education field. Power dynamics within institutional music education result in a kind of 'con sordino' (muting) of voice(s) operating within the lower echelons of the field. Widespread and highly disruptive institutional decisions such as closing campuses and discontinuing courses are analogous to the musical themes of 'calando' (decreasing tempo and volume) and 'morendo' (sound slowly dying away). Wright (2008) and Pitts (2002) are examples of researchers who have sought to listen to the student voice in music education, in part to redress the 'dearth of investigation into the lived experiences of young people' (Finney, 2003, p. 2).

The greatest challenges for participants were brought about by institutional decisions and processes regarding curricular and pedagogical structures and location and facilities. The vignette *Above and beyond* outlined how an institution-wide restructure resulted in the discreet units of the Bachelor of Music course (music theory, aural skills and styles analysis) being collapsed to form one unit 'Music Materials'. The decision resulted in an overall reduction in delivery time for each part of the course and was a clear illustration of an imposed institutional decision resulting in limitations to teaching and learning

and constraints to teaching capacities. The story highlighted the extraordinary efforts of KJ, a sessional staff member of the music department, within the context of growing institutional constraints. The vignette explored power structures between the dominant (the institution) and the dominated (music department staff and students). The agency of the music department to construct curriculum was at first limited by the mandated constraints of the institutional hierarchy - in the form of curriculum review and amendment, resulting in the reduction in teaching time and resources. Anxiety arose due to the desire to maintain quality in teaching and the student experience. Tension ensued via the visceral manifestation of institutional agency – directions for curricular and pedagogical reform do not involve choice but are, rather, mandated. Staff and student attempts to assert power through protestation or counter argument fell on deaf ears. Thus, anxiety was accentuated by the inability to assert power in the circumstances and by the possible need to compromise the quality of teaching, learning and the student experience.

Institutions generally, have been criticised for this process of homogenised or 'one size fits all' decision making (Johansen, 2009, Philo and Parr, 2000, Törnqvist, 2004). Such processes, it is argued, rely on the implementation of overarching educational policies (such as curriculum frameworks and pedagogical rationalisation) across the entire institutional field without due consideration, and often to the detriment of, the particular curricular and pedagogical requirements of higher music education (Johansen, 2009). Institutional decision making that fails to account for discipline specific exigencies, or even proceeds despite departmental advice to the contrary, operate in the context of the constructed and maintained hierarchical power structures that impose educational compromises on discipline areas, teaching staff and, finally, students. Such agentic paradigms can also result in a perception from those adversely affected by decision making that not only do they lack power to make decisions to support particular educational need but indeed, are not trusted to be able to do so. Research has shown how serious constraints to student capacity to enjoy and learn can occur as a result of homogenised curricular approaches to education (Faubel et al., 2009, Green, 2007). Wright (2008, p. 398) concluded that 'a uniform approach to classroom

music, however, well-conceived and executed, rides roughshod over these sensitive relationships and may well serve to distance pupils from their music education'. On the other hand, Papageorgi et al. (2010) found institutional cultures that *did* create consultative, collaborative and interactive decision making processes were judged very favourably by students. For example, in discussing approaches to teaching music composition, Deutsch (2010) argued that as composition involved innovative and original activity then pedagogy should necessarily be subjectively and inclusively orientated.

Notions of agency in educational fields are also relevant to particular educational disciplines and to the people and places tasked with the responsibility of teaching them. Music departments tend to rank relatively lowly in large formal tertiary institutions, and as outlined by many participants, music was often under resourced and deprioritised in secondary school system. As Pitts (2003, p. 281) observed:

'Music has always had a tenuous foothold in the school curriculum, and often seems in danger of being similarly marginalized or invisible within universities. Music departments are generally quite small in student numbers, and occupy a vulnerable position amongst science departments that can attract greater research funding, engineering departments with more obvious vocational value, and other arts departments which avoid the apparent frivolity of a performing element.'

Indeed music might be seen as having relatively low status within the 'hierarchy of disciplines' across the institution (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 97). By extension, music education has, at least in recent times, experienced a sense of powerlessness as the place and value of music teaching and learning has been questioned. For example Roennfeldt (2011, p. 231) observed that 'the political need to self-justify and fend off threats to survival is a constantly recurring theme in the story of music within Australia's post-school (tertiary) institutions'. The presence, therefore, of a range of delineating and constraining hierarchical structures and processes within formal institutional contexts have resulted in significant levels of powerlessness within many of those attempting to negotiate these fields.

The story of the 'Student lounge' explored how institutional processes and concomitant restrictions threatened to block the establishment of a communal place for students. The initial institutional response to the creation of an idiosyncratic space that fell outside the standard teaching physical paradigm was experienced as negative and limiting. The story exposed the dynamics of control in institutional fields where discreet parts of the whole often go unacknowledged or ignored and where specialist pedagogical or space needs go unmet. The story brought sharp focus to the often marginalised and limited spaces and places where music doing and learning take place.

In The party Mick's good natured but passionate questions ultimately represented a powerlessness to understand how measuring processes occurred. There appeared to be a suspicion that some grading 'involved personal opinion' rather than objective application of clear measures. Participants who complained that assessment criteria were not consistent across the units were illustrative of the power imbalances between those actively assessing and those being passively assessed. Mick's insistent questions highlighted perceptions of the 'mystery' of assessment criteria and processes. Such unknowns recall Bourdieu's (1986, p. 45) reference to the 'play of cultured allusions' operating in the classification and evaluation of cultural product. Excluded from these processes, students experienced a sense of powerlessness to question, challenge, understand or change hierarchical processes of legitimisation.

There was also an acute sense of powerlessness in John's initial reactions to performing poorly in recital assessment contexts. It had not occurred to John to ask, suggest, or even demand, that he pursue the kinds of music that he was interested in. John appeared conditioned to the idea that he was a passive member of the institutional environment, unable, or perhaps discouraged, to take an active role in the nature and direction of his own education. John was simply resigned to having to learn and perform music that he neither understood nor felt connected to, rather than pushing to explore music that he would prefer to play. John was ready to leave music study because of this dissatisfaction rather than trying to change things for the better. Again, like Bourdieu's participants, he was prepared to 'admit defeat' because 'a sense of confusion

often leads to simple refusal' (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 38). John possessed no voice and would have walked away in silence if not for intervention and an opportunity to express some of his concerns.

The vignette highlighted my concern in learning of John's lack of enjoyment and engagement. John's individual background and subsequent struggles had remained hidden until I learned of them through a casual conversation. I was obviously aware that some students did not seem particularly enamoured of certain styles or subjects but the reasons, and stories, remained relatively unexplored. It was basic human empathy that pushed me to ask after a person who appeared to be struggling. It may even have been a chance occurrence. Whilst I was interested in John's background and more able to understand his feelings, it was concerning he had not played any active part in the choice of repertoire for a recital assessing his own musical ability. I realise now that John was a student without any sense of institutional agency, a *passive* participant to whom things were done to rather than one who is able to *act* in their own interests. To this end, Mills (2008, p. 82) has argued that 'many marginalised students, for example, take things for granted, rather than recognising that there are ways that their situation could be transformed'.

Discussing the experiences of first year tertiary music students in the UK, Burland and Pitts (2007, p. 290) suggested that a lack of voice is explained by 'students who have spent many years answering questions only when invited'. Students unaccustomed to speaking up and expressing themselves struggle to 'negotiate new relationships lecturers in tutorials, seminars and lectures' (Burland and Pitts, 2007, p. 290). Pitts (2002) argued that, at least until recently, the idea of university students questioning their own university experiences or suggesting improvements was highly unusual. Indeed Seale (2010, p. 997) observed that much of the qualitative research into music education 'gave little consideration...to issues such as equality and empowerment'.

In *I just don't get it* I concluded with a paragraph expressing concerns about 'power imbalance'. Stakelum (2008, p. 101) has asserted that 'teachers ...can be seen to implement a version of knowledge set down at official policy level'. It is sobering to realise that students struggle to effect change and accept aspects of curriculum or pedagogy in order to gain the necessary qualifications. The

vignette is a poignant reminder of how little real power students have in educational settings. My participants chose to enter and negotiate these settings, and payed to do so with their money and time, and yet possessed very little agency to create the conditions of their own learning and growth in the very activity they were passionate to pursue.

7.6. Coda: concluding comments

Participant habitus and capital were in ‘tense alignment’ with the field they were attempting to negotiate. Participants possessed limited agency attempting to conform to institutional expectations and accrue legitimate music and academic knowledge. These conditions led directly to struggles and challenges detailed by participants and the ensuing anxiety and impacts on personal well-being, tensions I had observed in students over a decade of teaching in various formal music education fields. This thesis set out to determine reasons for these tensions. My aim had been to redress a gap in the research of music education focusing on tertiary music student disaffection. I felt this exploration and discussion was necessary, because as Myers (2008, p. 6) has noted, ‘almost no energy is vested in understanding why such large numbers of otherwise musically intrigued people either avoid or disengage from systematic music education’.

The field dynamics discussed in this chapter effectively elucidated some answers to the initial thesis questions detailed in the introductory chapter, such as:

‘Specifically, I have observed that many music students lack motivation and often exhibit signs of alienation, frustration or boredom. Often, it appears that students feel disengaged from the music education community and their studies. Why does this happen, when these students are immersed in music – themes and activities that are meant to be exciting and engaging?’

This discussion chapter also completes the first of the three aims of this research, again as presented in the introduction chapter of this thesis:

‘Specifically I aim to deduce the reasons why some music students do not appear to enjoy or connect with their music studies’.

Analysis of student voices articulating the experiences of challenges with negotiating tertiary music fields has led to some significant insights that help to explain the questions that initially generated this research. Chapter 8 discusses participant attempts to disrupt and challenge the constraints of the tertiary music education field, highlighting a ‘release’ from the tense alignments of habitus, cultural capital and field discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 8. **Release: successful negotiations and disruptions in tertiary music education**

8.1. **Prelude**

'If you think that you're strong enough

If you think you belong enough

If you think that you're strong enough

If you think you belong enough'

['Nice dream', Radiohead](#)

Analysis of participant data via the use of cultural reproduction theory can have the potential to produce negative, or 'deficit', accounts of student experiences in educational and cultural fields. As outlined extensively in previous chapters, cultural theory lenses highlighted a series of challenges and negative experiences. Student habitus often appeared misaligned to the field they were attempting to negotiate. This led to challenges with attaining sufficient music (cultural) capital and in finding a legitimate place, and voice, as active social agents. These tensions manifested in disappointment, lack of confidence, reduced levels of fun and enjoyment, anxiety, alienation and even disengagement with the doing and making of music - the very thing that had drawn musicians to formal educational fields. Other examinations of challenges in music education have likewise uncovered associations between anxiety and curricular expectation that 'exceeds skill' (Freer, 2008, p. 108)

Participant experiences in my inquiry are corroborated by research into the links between student habitus and negotiation of educational fields (see for example (Mantie, 2013, Moore, 2012) . This research has explored extensive limitations placed on students attempting to negotiate educational fields with incomplete or inconstant habitus, where 'the dynamics of the field, while not insurmountable, provide undeniable advantage to some rather than others' (Mantie, 2013, p. 43). Educational fields involve 'socio-historical institutional contexts, settings, dispositions and values that students must negotiate' (Moore, 2012, p.68). As highlighted by many of the students in my research, 'the ways in which they negotiate and experience the field depends largely on their musical

backgrounds or habitus and prior music education (whether formal or informal), identified here as cultural capital' (Moore, 2012, p. 68). Mantie (2013) identified strong links between the habitus of music students and their choices, capabilities and perspectives in formal tertiary music education contexts and concluded that music education could not afford to ignore the effects that student backgrounds had on student experiences.

My investigations into the VU music student challenges aimed to uncover the nature of, and reasons for 'deficit' experiences. However, my research has perhaps somewhat paradoxically also exposed a series of positive or 'credit' experiences of these students in the same fields. Participants recognised instances where their habitus was accommodated or acknowledged within the educational context. Many managed to accrue significant degrees of music capital. They explored, challenged, tested and disrupted the boundaries of music education fields and consequently developed autonomous and capable self-perceptions. Students achieved a degree of 'legitimacy' – although it is worth noting that this term is fluid and subject to a wealth of competing and contradictory definitions. Finally, and most pleasing to discover, many students developed and exhibited characteristics associated with a state of well-being. Reed-Dalahay (2009, p. 42) articulated the sometimes paradoxical nature of educational experiences in describing the wider educational field as 'a site of power and conflict in stratified human societies, in which competing claims for dominance are enacted'. She added however that 'at the same time, educational institutions are potential locations for intellectual growth and discovery' (Reed-Danahay, 2009, p. 42).

The path to and through education is analogous to the *musical score* or story involving both *tension and release* points throughout the narrative. Protagonists were confronted by a series of challenges (tensions) to overcome or manage (release). Their journeys wended and waned, rising and falling towards the concluding passages. Positive experiences constituted moments of 'release' in the analogous musical score. Manoeuvring and tilting cultural theory lenses uncovered celebratory and emancipatory possibilities for these students.

The nature and application of cultural reproduction theories as they relate to music education have similarly been explored and debated (see for example

Mills, 2008, Driver, 2011, Moore, 2012, Wright, 2008). Whilst much of Bourdieu's (1986) writing in 'Distinction' focused on predetermined social and cultural characteristics within agents, resulting in limited capacities and potentials, the most compelling aspect of the discourse, to my mind, was the interplay of power dynamics within domestic, educational and social fields. Reed-Danahay (2009, p. 42) identified educational institutions and fields as 'important sites for the production of relations of power'. Societal fields can be conceptualised as containing struggles for agency: for winning and losing; for failure and success. Despite often significant disadvantages, brought about by entrenched hierarchical and limiting social frameworks, individuals do have the *potential* to act, change and succeed (although I would again note that notions of 'success' are highly subjective and contestable). The experience and outcomes for social agents are not always or necessarily fixed. There is potential in educational fields for creative *production*, in addition or in contrast to closed and directed cultural *reproduction*. This, coupled with subjective possibilities for action, change and growth, allows people at least the opportunity to flourish. Moore (2012, p. 67) has described Bourdieu's notion of fields as 'areas of struggle for domination and power in which systems of hierarchy are *contested or challenged* (emphasis added)'. Such a description invites the possibility that positions may not necessarily be fixed and that struggles might lead, to some extents and in some instances, to the advantage of the student in educational hierarchies.

Mills (2008) argued that reading of Bourdieu allowed for the active possibilities and power of agents within fields and that 'habitus shapes but does not determine our life choices' (Mills, 2008, p. 82). Mills (2008) proposed that students might respond differently within fields, either remaining subject to the constraints imposed by an inconstant or inadequate habitus or, alternatively, by creating and exploring opportunities to change and grow. Driver (2011, p. 985) preferred to characterise the habitus as 'reflexive' and argued that backgrounds and dispositions are subject to change through exposure to myriad idiosyncrasies of our life journeys. Participants in my research came to formal tertiary music study with habitus of low cultural (music) capital and a familiarity with distinctive and functional approaches to music making often inconsistent

with the formulaic expectations for reproduction. Some students (like Ken in the vignette *Did you hear the one about the drummer?*) were unable to engage in active shaping of his habitus within the educational domain. Ken, it seemed, took 'things for granted, rather than recognising that there are ways that their situation could be transformed' (Mills, 2008, p. 82). However, many active, creative and resilient participants *were* able to act in these conditions to make choices and to grow, flourish and succeed.

It is not only students who are engaged in the struggle for agency in educational contexts where hierarchical tensions exist between constituents. Institutional power dynamics can be likened either to contests of power amongst those already possessing power or, more optimistically as opportunities to acknowledge and embrace the potential for all participants (Fraser, 2014). Educational leaders, curriculum designers, teachers – all those possessing the inherent power to grant legitimacy – have a choice to understand and acknowledge the student status and experience or merely continue to perpetuate the hierarchical and didactic reproductive cycle. Wright (2008) urged music teachers to challenge the traditional styles of music and of music teaching (as part of the dominant habitus of teacher in the educational field) and embrace and acknowledge the infinite variation of the student habitus as part of a participatory and equal learning partnership. Mills (2008, p. 79) concluded that 'there is transformative potential in his (Bourdieu's) theoretical constructs and that these suggest possibilities for schools and teachers to improve the educational outcomes of marginalised students'.

Lebler (2007, 2008) has presented and discussed findings from research into one educational context attempting to achieve such 'transformative potential' through self-directed learning and assessment. Lebler provided a compelling illustration of how traditional educational paradigms, based upon active/passive transferences and reproductions of formal music capital, could be challenged. The curricular and pedagogical model presented by Lebler contested the reproductive aims and outcomes of anachronistic music education approaches focusing only on the form of music skills and knowledge. A student directed learning context, such as the one outlined by Lebler (2008) shifted the focus to function, discovery and creativity in music and so assisted students to become

active and empowered music graduates in 21st Century music and creative industries.

Employing the lenses and perspectives outlined above, I have found that participants most valued experiences where their predominantly practical habitus was acknowledged and accommodated. In these contexts students were able to accrue music capital and achieve successful learning outcomes. They developed confidence and agency by exploring, challenging and testing the conditions of formal education fields. Students developed resilience and a sense of belonging in collaborative and shared spaces, and so were able to flourish as students, musicians and individuals. These 'release' experiences were heard through the voicing of their stories.

8.2. Voicing the Habitus

'Oh, the look and the sound of the voice

They try, they try

Oh, the shape and the power of the voice

In strong low tones'

['The voice', Ultravox](#)

8.2.1. Prelude: the value of voicing story

Participant stories released the individual habitus from the vast darkness of the generic 'student experience'. Backgrounds, preferences and ideas were able to be heard in the foreground, rising above the cacophonous noise of the quantitative, institutionally orientated narrative. The individual student voice became unmuted. The student voice was repositioned to the forefront of the educational soundscape and so was heard. The voice was brought back to life, and sang playfully, *con vivace* (lively). Student stories finally responded to the call, where too often there has been little or no response afforded in institutional contexts. The voices sang of many positive, emancipatory and joyful experiences.

To reiterate, I use the term 'habitus' to define the backgrounds, stories, music preferences, and the ways of doing, knowing and learning of participants. Habitus is constituted by the likes, interests and music preferences, the

‘...affiliation to a particular social sub-culture... (an) integral part of their personal identity’ (Wright, 2008, p. 398). In the context of this discussion ‘habitus’ involves all the ‘dispositions students have acquired vis-a-vis music practices, traditions and prior music education experiences, whether formal or informal’ (Moore, 2012, p. 68). Habitus here then is the total lived experience of each individual, the analogous playlist of their personal and musical lives.

Students valued the opportunities to voice stories, illustrating the importance of having the musical habitus understood and acknowledged. The delight displayed by many at being invited to share their musical journeys was palpable. Participants recounted memories of early music making, exploring their interest in organised sound, discovering new music and did so with genuine joy and wonder. They appreciated the opportunity to have various music activities and achievements acknowledged. Some commented that they were surprised by ‘how good it felt’ to talk about their musical selves, to share music preferences, memories and dreams.

Interviews and focus groups represented the first real opportunity in the tertiary environment for many of the students to talk openly and honestly about musical identity, learning needs and the challenges and triumphs of their journeys in music. Students commented on the significance of sharing histories and described stories as ‘important’. Kyrie summed this up by declaring:

‘The university needs to understand the musical experiences and influences that led to people coming into the course so they can understand where the student wants to go musically and help them to get there. That knowledge might affect the way teachers teach or what they teach.’

George agreed:

‘Students should be allowed to say what we think about the course. Teachers should ask us. Surveys are not this and we don’t know what happens with these – (we) need a better way to communicate. There should be notice of what we say and they should show us how they are trying to fix the problems we are raising. What students say and think about the course should be taken seriously and acted upon.’

Students clearly identified the importance of opportunities to tell their stories, to share their ideas and to be acknowledged and understood. Comments illustrated the significance of individual musical habitus and the relevance of knowing, accommodating and aligning habitus within music education. Listening to and understanding student voices created the circumstances for the identification and celebration of the musical habitus. This process also nurtured conditions where the music capital accrued could be, at least in part, tailored to accommodate background and disposition. Interestingly, this passion for the process of sharing stories also spoke to the limited opportunities for participants in educational contexts to voice their ideas and challenges. Many students were able to confidently and comprehensively relate musical values, preferences, desires, goals and challenges and articulate circumstances where habitus was accommodated or acknowledged within various aspects of formal music study.

8.2.2. Exploring habitus in (my) stories

Autoethnographic analysis of my vignettes identified many moments of release for students where the habitus was brought to the fore. The stories illustrated the conditions for both the creation of tension and the potential opportunities for release. In, All that Jazz John finally admitted his preference for Progressive Rock. Until that point John had neither proffered this information nor been asked to share. The conversation enabled John to voice his musical inclination and the significant competence and experience he had in this area of music – particularly in contrast to his prowess in other areas of music and in the more formal academic music arena. John's story, entailing limited and unengaged school music experiences, shed light on his deficits in music capital. The unearthing of John's habitus had a number of important effects. The opportunity to tell his story was clearly a relief for John who was trapped in an educational experience he felt unsuited to. Sharing his music identity suddenly opened a door for John and allowed for the possibility of pursuing his style of music in a formal educational context. John's musical personality was able to be celebrated rather than ignored and led to a more enjoyable and closer engagement with music study. The outcome saw a closer alignment of student habitus with the music curriculum.

There were similarities with Maria's Eat your greens story. Maria's realisation that she was likely to fail sparked a conversation that highlighted her limited academic background and skills. The exposure of these challenges meant her circumstances could be accommodated through extra assistance and directed help. Had the story remained untold Maria may have just failed and slipped silently away as another unexplained fail grade was recorded on the student ledger. In this instance Maria's limited academic habitus was discovered and led to the prospect of attention and amelioration.

I just don't get it was a stark illustration of the misalignment of student habitus with critical parts of the formal music curriculum. However, the story really highlighted the importance of understanding the student habitus in designing relevant curriculum and encouraging engaged learners. Ongoing discussions with disgruntled students allowed for the discovery of their predominantly practical and functional habitus and particular stylistic preference amongst students. This knowledge led to an understanding of *why* students were struggling with the unit content and teaching style. Awareness of student habitus provided the opportunity to reflect upon the problem. The content and nature of this area of the curriculum eventually changed to include more practical content and the incorporation of a range of stylistic approaches that better accommodated the music backgrounds and preferences of the students.

The party explored questions about formal music assessment. The discussion explored the gaps, inconsistencies and differences between formal measurement of creativity (as an inherent aspect of formal music education) and the doing and enjoyment of music making (inextricably linked with the music student habitus). There was no neat conclusion but empathy and appreciation was achieved by both parties. I acknowledged the inconstancy between the student habitus and an educational paradigm that required music making to be formally measured. The mystique of academic classifications was partially removed. Mick appeared to accept that formal assessment was one, rather than the only, way of valuing music. The conversation was started, interestingly, in a social context suited to the music student habitus providing for a safer, common, space for interaction between student and teacher. 'The Student lounge explored the importance of making a place for students to 'hang

out'. The lounge created a space for students to share music preferences and talk about favourite artists; to chat, make friends and learn about one another. The lounge soon became adorned with posters and other accoutrements that students brought in from home to become a kind of physical manifestation of the student habitus. The lounge provided a space for students to share origins and identities outside the structured environment of the classroom. It was *their* lounge and a 'home away from home' inside the institutional environment.

Question and answer explored the opportunity that the audition process provided to uncover the student habitus. The story clearly identified the value and necessity of coming to know potential students in improving the study experience. The vignette clearly identified the audition process as a 'first step' in an ongoing and in depth process of exploring student backgrounds and dispositions through ongoing discussion and opportunities, including qualitative research contexts such as this current inquiry. But the story also hinted at the inadequacy of a 15 minute chat for uncovering the myriad stories of potential students. There was an implication that there needs to be far more investigation and time spent in order to do this. The vignette highlighted how effective alignment of student habitus and music curriculum and pedagogy could lead to much higher levels of student engagement and a reduction on behavioural and attitude issues. Moore (2012) has similarly argued for transitions to tertiary studies that accommodate students from a range of different backgrounds. Lebler (2007, p. 218) has urged education providers to make 'explicit' to students the nature and expectations of the music curriculum and pedagogy. More careful and open discussion prior to study might achieve such goals.

In My (not so) funny valentine a student's crippling performance anxiety was finally exposed. The failure to voice the words in a public performance piece paradoxically led to a discussion where a brittle and anxious part of the student's habitus was identified by both the student and teachers. The discovery led to an amelioration of the student's situation, a strong illustration of how knowing what is really going on can lead better outcomes for students. The incident created an opportunity to explore the wider issue of performance anxiety, and nerves, in the context of formal music education contexts. The exploration provided ideas for improvements in managing these situations and

improving the experiences of students in performance contexts. The vignette highlighted the paradoxical juxtaposition of the habitus of music making in informal contexts, and the formulaic evaluation of that same music making in formal music education contexts.

8.2.3. Further discussion

The power of voice to explore and discover student habitus is supported by a range of researchers in the field of music education. Burt and Mills (2006) argued for the importance of the student perspective as an under-utilised yet highly valuable part of the process of ethnographic research into transition into music education. Burt et al. (2007) identified that the voluntary sharing of the student habitus was often a challenge due to the passive nature of many educational experience and contexts. The conditioning existent in formal educational paradigms, where information about the student habitus is neither called for nor volunteered, has resulted in the need for educators and educational environments to purposefully and actively create the conditions where the sharing of habitus can occur more freely and effectively. Deutsch (2010, p. 68) described each student as 'inhabit(ing) their own musical world' and therefore it was incumbent upon teachers to become familiar with these worlds. Coming to 'know' the student habitus may not always be a straightforward or unproblematic task and Lamont (2011, p. 374) has reminded us that 'there is considerable diversity in people's individual narratives'. Lamont (2011) acknowledged that there needs to be more in depth exploration, understanding and reflecting upon the inherent complexity of the huge range of musicians and music student stories and Driver (2011) urged researchers to move beyond a merely surface or symbolic understanding of agents.

Educational institutions have too often favoured 'macro' perspectives, rather than engaging in subjective conversations with the students. Personal discussions encourage a more valuable understanding of the student as individual rather than merely as one of a 'class' of students identified through quantitative student data collection processes. Universities have traditionally assigned collective characterisation in relation to students rather than listening to and identifying idiosyncratic characteristics. The challenge is to understand

diverse and individual students rather than describing/ascribing homogenous labelling. Seale (2010) urged educators to actively investigate previously silent student voices and to strive for understanding and further reflection upon the narratives to inform teaching. Importantly Seale (2010) warned that this process needed to be equal and participatory rather than an active/passive research methodology (incidentally, as is the case with much traditional music teaching pedagogy).

The importance of listening and responding effectively to student voice in order to improve the student learning experience is widely supported (Baker, 2007, Läänemets et al., 2012, Parker, 2010). Seale (2010, p 1004) wrote:

‘When given the time to engage with the rich, detailed and complete stories contributed by participants and to discuss with colleagues and reflect, teachers began to indicate that the stories were quite powerful for them, because they revealed not only the factors that were important to students, but the impact that these factors had on their academic and personal lives.’

Listening to the student voice to uncover the person within could assist in transition (Burt and Mills, 2006) and student engagement and motivation (Burt et al., 2007) and more effective and tailored curriculum and assessment design.

8.2.4. Concluding comments on voicing the habitus

Student voices related their backgrounds, preferences, hope and fears. Participant habitus was revealed to be overwhelmingly *practical* and *functional* transitioning into the learning environment. Students entered music learning contexts with a familiarity and preference for practical and functional music making and aspects of music. They recognised and acknowledged aspects of their music studies that both *appreciated* and *accommodated* the habitus. Participants thus viewed these aspects of study as positive and they contributed to enjoyable or positive aspects of their experience of formal music learning. Lebler (2008) found students responded positively to self-directed and functional music curriculum and pedagogy that was applicable to their backgrounds and interests. Participants experienced the habitus being accepted or accommodated as process of *legitimacy*. This manifested in

feelings of belonging. In these circumstances students were able to learn more effectively and gain valuable music skills and knowledge.

8.3. Enjoying growth and agency

*'But if you sing, sing, sing, sing, sing, sing,
For the love you bring won't mean a thing,
Unless you sing, sing, sing, sing'*

'Sing', Travis

The sharing of personal musical journeys created unique learning opportunities. Students realised they had some footing in the institution and that their stories really did matter. They were able to reflect upon the depth and quality of learning achievements. Students learned they had a degree of power to affect changes and speak for themselves. They learned the importance of sharing stories and experiences, between teachers and learners and amongst one another. Students learned about each other's backgrounds, likes, challenges and opportunities and about the process of collecting, sharing and using information to inform the building of ideas about music education. The participants in this research came to realise their importance in the process of reflecting upon and reconsidering ways that students might be most effectively taught about music.

Students were 'delighted' at the opportunity to share their stories and 'surprised' by just 'how good that felt'. Students acknowledged their achievements as students and musicians. They reflected on the integral nature of music making and learning in their lives. Participants glowed with pleasure and pride as they recounted the passing of a theory exam, the submission of a research assignment, a successful performance exam or the mastering of a series of scales. The sharing of musical journeys, goals and hopes afforded students to have their achievements - their musical selves – acknowledged.

In All that Jazz John quite clearly enjoyed the opportunity to relate his musical self. He appeared genuinely comforted that someone (even a teacher) cared who he was and where he had come from. John experienced a sense of relief (or release) at finally having his true musical identity discovered. This

acknowledgement assisted John to more freely approach music and study. Similarly, Melanie, in My (not so) funny valentine experienced a release from the tension of performance anxiety by having this significant challenge exposed. The physical act of being sick on stage was acutely symbolic of a release of this tension. Finally voicing a fear that had been suppressed was of great relief to Melanie and led to acknowledgement and accommodation of her circumstances.

Lamont (2011) has highlighted the importance of telling and exploring the student narrative in the development of self-identity. Recounting musical stories brought the musical and personal identities of my participants into sharper focus. Recalling memories helped participants to form a clearer picture of themselves as musicians and music students. One participant, Caroline, remarked that the interview 'felt like a psychology session!' and laughed freely, revelling in the opportunity to tell and have her story heard. Students reflected that stories were 'important' and so inferred that they were they also. Voicing musical hopes, fears and achievements led to a realisation for the students that they were unique, special individuals with specific and special identities. For many, the discussions that took place as part of this research were the first opportunity to talk about the inner musical self and reflect upon who that person was. Participants saw their lives and selves as a 'storyline', like a musical score brought to life through performance.

Participants became emboldened as stories were shared and achievements marked and acknowledged. Towards the end of one interview, Kyrie declared:

'The university needs to understand the musical experiences and influences that led to people coming into the course so they can understand where the student wants to go musically and help them to get there.'

Lebler (2007, p. 218) described such a process as the 'genuine recognition of the students' expertise' and 'respect for the range of preferred approaches to learning'. Kyrie's words spoke to the importance and benefits of a collaborative, inclusive and shared educational experience, where the process of education involves acknowledgement of all voices and the exploration of all stories. Kyrie's

opinion signalled a confidence in insisting that the student voice equally important to those of the teacher and institution in the educational process. The invitation and opportunity to hear the student voice illustrated an educative process where students could be active and equal members of the learning community. In this way the learning space could be democratic rather than hierarchical and authoritarian. George's declaration that 'what students say and think about the course should be taken seriously and acted upon' evinced a strong, confident and resilient student voice.

Student voices were sometimes muted within the institutional setting as constraints and challenges occurred around and to students. Some participants in this study felt powerless to act against hierarchical decisions that had profound and often negative impacts on their learning. Their experiences mirrored other countless educational contexts where students are constrained, limited, and adversely affected. They are the unheard voices of disenfranchisement. The voicing of stories represents inclusion, power, equality and representation. As Seale (2010, p. 1010) declared 'student voice projects that adopt participatory methods have an increased potential to empower students'. In *The party*, Mick's insistent and bold challenges to me (as a representative of institutional authority) exemplified the disruptive possibilities to address states of powerlessness within student populations. Mick embodied the student capacity to question, criticise and test and so establish substantial agency and shift the power dynamics within formal educational fields.

I have observed that many students are sceptical or nonplussed about university surveys and other attempts to capture their 'student experience'. These stances challenge institutional mantras concerning students, illustrated through such aphorisms as 'student-centred learning'. Reliance upon large scale quantitative data collections fails to create opportunities for students to make substantive comment and to have those views meaningfully taken into account. Roennfeldt (2011, p. 239) suggested that the stark paradox between rhetoric and reality might be due to the university sector's preoccupation with staff and student 'outputs'. Seale (Seale, 2010) also reflected upon the tertiary sector's apparent desire to listen, but not necessarily act, upon the student voice, as though the process of hearing was the necessary end game. Seale

(2010, p. 999) wondered whether educational hierarchies were content to encourage 'a voice that expresses views but doesn't necessarily demand equality or empowerment, in other words a voice that does not impel action'.

The process of inviting a series of complex, and personal stories highlighted for participants the ineffectiveness of previous 'opportunities' for enfranchisement and illustrated clearly the unequal nature of the dynamics within the educational field. The opportunity to be heard led to acknowledgement, acceptance and legitimacy for students. Lamont (2011) pointed to the divergent, complex pathways and journeys of musicians over their lives. Lamont (2011) identified that standard predictions, assumptions and statistical trends don't always align with individual narratives, hence the absolute necessity to create opportunities to hear, reflect upon and use lessons learned from individual stories.

Participants explored, challenged, tested, questioned and disrupted through the voicing of their musical selves. They thus developed a sense of personal power in the face of many challenges and constraints. This building of agency is analogous to the musical *crescendo* (rising) of voices from *piano* (soft) to *forte* (strong and loud). For Green (2006, p. 115), creating opportunities for learners to test and challenge meant 'allowing learners to 'get inside' the inherent meanings of music, freed for a moment from specific, and therefore limiting, delineations'. Mills (2008, p. 83) interpreted such testing and improvisation as an 'attempt by some students to make things happen, rather than have things happen to them.'

Asking questions and exploring educational boundaries was an important part of the process of legitimisation. Students came to see themselves as accepted members of the institutional and wider music communities. Participation in this research allowed students to be powerful actors in this interplay and to explore, voice, question, suggest, test and doubt their experiences and roles in the learning process. Students were able to implore teachers and the wider institution to understand and empathise. Students developed the confidence to honestly voice disagreement and call for change and improvement. Lebler (2008) has argued that equality in education and educational research requires investigative processes to be active, collaborative and discursive rather than passive, didactic and hierarchical.

Power dynamics in the educational field have long been weighted in favour of those sitting at the top of the educational hierarchy. Stephanie Pitts (2003, 2012) and Lucy Green (2007, 2008b), for example, have been forceful advocates for the need to promote the student voice as an active and exploratory player in music education. Whilst institutions have made attempts to listen, they rarely acknowledge the inherent inequality and powerlessness of students (Seale, 2010). Seale, (2010, p. 997) posited that 'there is perhaps scope for student voice work to be used much more explicitly to examine other less obvious ways in which students in higher education may feel oppressed' and thus possibly address such powerlessness to gain a real sense of agency and legitimacy within the educational field. When some of the participants in this study learned that their course was to be discontinued they decided to organise a petition and video testimonials to present to the university senior management. When protestations fell on deaf ears, the students understandably felt outraged. However, these attempts were indicative of the student voice growing in the confidence and calling to be heard. These are the voices recorded and aired through this research.

The development of personal agency in tertiary education settings allows students to reconceptualise their relationship with educators. This in turn leads to an altered paradigm that establishes within students a sense of autonomy and agency, enabling them to work *with*, not for or because of teachers (Burt et al., 2007). The positive 'release' experiences for participants achieved through the voicing of their stories emanated from the kind of educational contexts described by Parker (2010, p. 349) as 'a place of student voice'.

8.4. Achieving release through teaching and learning

'Make my way back home when I learn to fly high'

['Learn to fly', Foo Fighters](#)

The identification of relevant and appropriate areas of music curriculum provided 'release' experiences for students. Students appreciated opportunities for performing, composing and studying in predominantly functional contexts. Students were able to accrue valuable cultural music capital and gain a sense

or personal agency and well-being through the acknowledgement and accommodation of the habitus.

8.4.1. Accommodating the functional habitus

Students grew technical and music skills and knowledge through practical aspects of the curriculum such as the provision of one to one and small group instrumental studies classes. Students benefited from slow, personalised learning contexts that were able to address prior music capital deficits. They appreciated opportunities to grow their understanding of music theory as it applied to their playing, to learn to read music notation with confidence and to communicate effectively with appropriate musical language. These skills were developed through flexible, often self-directed and functional, learning contexts, where habitus and learning played together in harmony.

Research into the backgrounds and nature of music students has overwhelmingly found habitus rich in functional, practical and informal music making (see for example (Pulman, 2010, Green, 2007, Pitts, 2012). Music curriculum that understands and accommodates such backgrounds unsurprisingly results in positive reflections from students. Kiik-Salupere and Ross (2011) found that music students identified singing as one of the most enjoyable aspects of studying music. Papageorgi et al. (2010) reported that students placed a high importance on practical aspects of their course work, which then tended to lead to more effective and engaged learning. They also noted that students responded particularly well to learning opportunities provided through instrumental lessons. Burt and Mills (2006, p. 55) found that instrumental music studies were a 'very positive aspect of their (students') musical life'. Pitts (2012) has argued that formal music education needs to understand and provide for the fact that informal learning takes place outside of formal contexts.

Green (2006) identified the importance of accommodating and building the process of music *doing* in growing engagement with all aspects of music learning. She believed this increased engagement led to greater awareness which in turn produced greater understanding and learning. Similarly, Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007), exploring student perceptions of ensemble performance

contexts, found a range of positive learning and personal growth experiences when the opportunity to relate theoretical musical knowledge to performance actions was provided. Mills (2008, p. 84) suggested that 'schools can relate curricula to students' worlds, making the classroom more inclusive by legitimating locally produced knowledge'. Functional learning conditions involving creative, autonomous music making were seen by students as more akin to 'the informal learning approaches found in popular music outside structured education environments where it is normal for learning to be autonomous, self-directed, self-assessed and intrinsically motivated' (Lebler, 2008, p. 184).

Lamont (2011, p. 374) proposed that music students need to possess internal motivation, and what motivates them the most is a 'desire to make music and find out about it.' Playing and practice of music within the curriculum that allowed for the exploration of different music styles was experienced by participants as an acknowledgement of their different music backgrounds and stylistic preferences. Their music choices and interest were thus perceived as being *legitimate*. Green (2006, p. 102) proposed that 'through recognizing both musical and personal autonomy, we can perhaps also throw light on some issues concerning musical authenticity, especially the role of authenticity within music education'.

Participant backgrounds were overwhelmingly characterised by self-directed music making so, unsurprisingly, they responded very positively to areas of the curriculum that nurtured musical autonomy. Papageorgi et al. (2010) reported that participants clearly understood the importance of establishing informal learning and self-directed activities within formal music learning. Exploring perceptions of a new self-directed learning curriculum, Lebler (2007, p. 207) found that students appreciated working with teachers to build practical skills and capacities. Lebler (2007) reported that in these contexts students were able to demonstrate self-reflection, motivation and independent thought and action, along with concrete industry skills such as entrepreneurship and technological capacity. Green (2007) highlighted the importance of creativity in informal music contexts, which can be seen as emancipatory and autonomous in comparison to the restriction of formal music education reproduction.

Despite a range of commonalities participant backgrounds were also different and individual. Aspects of the curriculum such as instrumental lessons and small group ensembles allowed for individual attention, where diverse music experiences, knowing and learning could be accommodated and legitimated. Students were able to develop public versions of their musical selves through music performance experiences. They were able to explore and experiment with different musical personas and characters. Practical music classes and the student stage provided places and spaces for participants to improvise new musical ideas and new musical selves.

8.4.2. Agency through practice

Practical parts of the curriculum provided opportunities for participants to develop personal agency. In *All that Jazz*, John displayed courage in expressing his fears and sense of alienation. He made the decision to present his musical identity within the formal music education environment. Eventually, he was able to develop sufficient self-awareness and confidence to find a balance between his own music passions and new and challenging styles of music. John learn to explore creatively rather than merely reproducing what teachers told him. In this way he was able to directly challenge what Moore (2012, p. 67) has described as the 'hegemony of Western classical music' in the music education landscape.

Stakelum (2008) explored the nature of power within the classroom and found that musical dispositions and values of teachers were valued more than the student habitus, leading to a power imbalance. Dominant teacher habitus is played out variously in educational fields via the choice of musical style on which curriculum is based. Teacher/student inequity also manifests through the prioritisation of theory over practice, or formal teacher led assessment paradigms rather than creative self and peer assessments music making. The vignette *The party* explored the questions and challenges students have of the formal assessment of musical skill and creativity. Mick's questions and criticisms though evinced a real sense of personal agency. Here was as a self-empowered musician developing a strong sense of self. Mick's healthy suspicions and wry knowing smile represented an emerging realisation of the

fallibility of finite adjudication and the importance of developing a realistic sense of one's own capabilities and achievements. By questioning the validity of formal music assessment Mick was challenging the authority of others to ultimately judge his music ability. Mick's story evoked 'situations of rupture and transformation (that) occur when there is no longer acceptance of the rules of the game and the goals proposed by the dominant class' (Mills, 2008, p. 87).

Lebler (2007) reported that developing student and peer-led assessment practices led to increased engagement in study experiences. Students gained a sense of personal awareness and agency through involvement in evaluative processes that worked amongst and across all members of the learning community. The model Lebler (2007) explored was constructed in contrast to traditional top down hierarchical, pedagogical models. Lebler (2008) has likewise argued that graduates entering the music industry will need to be able to confidently and accurately assess their own progress, challenges and successes. Mick appeared to grasp that relying on formal and externalised assessment was not only disappointing at times but also unsatisfactory in terms of an ultimate or objective evaluation of his practical skills and musical prowess.

8.4.3. Developing identity and well-being through performance

Students thoroughly enjoyed aspects of performance based units of study. Many reported that playing with other students in ensemble groups was fun and they clearly relished the collective outcomes the group was able to achieve. Pulman (2010, p. 397) believed that 'the capacity to work effectively within a team is an attribute that is as prized in the music profession as it is in many other areas of human creativity.' Practical music units provided participants with the space and opportunity to develop musical identities. Group music making contexts were intense and personal. Having to perform publically in front of peers and teachers was both challenging and exhilarating. The positive reception of a live performance was a very real demonstration of goals achieved. Preparing for and presenting the musical self on stage required resilience, particularly as most music students (like most public performers) suffered from various degrees of performance anxiety. Performance opportunities provided a similar fun and freedom experienced in informal music

contexts. Instrumental tuition that built technical skills and proficiency underpinned these performance contexts and assisted in establishing confidence in students. The development of self-belief and music instrumental prowess acted as a release from tensions caused by entering formal music study with low technical music capital.

John, in *All that Jazz*, experienced a sense of exhilaration and pride in performing and presenting 'his music'. John was able to overcome challenges he had experienced in successfully negotiating unfamiliar and testing music styles. Barry (2007, p. 5) observed that 'students enjoy having the opportunity to choose some of their repertoire and tend to exert more time and effort practicing pieces they have chosen.' Students like John experienced relief and a sense of joy when able to freely explore and present their musical identities.

8.4.4. Accruing theoretical and academic skills

As has been extensively discussed many participants struggled with the theoretical and academic aspects of the formal music curriculum. However, students were able to more successfully negotiate the curriculum when these units were structured around *functional* knowledge with practical applications. Papageorgi et al. (2010) likewise found that students in a Northern English tertiary popular music course related positively to teaching that allowed for the hands on application of more formal theoretical knowledge in performance contexts.

Participants lacking music theory skills due to limited or poor quality prior music education experiences were able to accrue significant music theory skills. Students experienced pride and achievement as they eventually began to understand a wider range of musical ideas and the ability to use music information in a range of contexts. For those who had only been interested in performing music, developing an understanding of musical language added an extra string to their bow. Many students really struggled in these classes but eventually prevailed due to the development of applied and flexible music theory curriculum and pedagogy. Students came to see themselves as successful music students with a confidence to effectively articulate musical ideas, rather than 'just' players who could play.

Learning that took students out of their 'comfort zone' provided opportunities to challenge self and other perceptions of learning abilities and musicianship. Successful negotiation of music theory and academic requirements disrupted assumptions about the capacities of 'untrained' musicians, 'ear players' and academically challenged students. Students came to understand they *could* succeed in areas they had had struggled in previously. Freer (2008, p. 108) argued that learning becomes more seamless as challenges are overcome. However, Freer (2008) warned that anxiety arises when challenges are pitched higher than musical ability. As outlined in the previous chapter, participants experienced tensions when formal learning requirements assumed particular music skills that students did not in fact possess, or instituted teaching practice that did not accommodate learner backgrounds and skills limitations. Participants experienced self-awareness and clarity when environments were able to nurture the skills required to meet challenges.

Formal tertiary music provided a series of intellectual challenges to be met and overcome. Units with an academic focus provided the opportunity to learn to locate and use information and to explore ideas. Students were encouraged and supported to think, speak and write confidently about music and the place and role of music in their worlds. Participants identified musical intellect as an important part of becoming rounded, capable and confident musicians and artists. Learning to read more deeply and widely about music enabled students to explore musical identities and build intellectual inquiry about creativity and their place in the world of music knowing and making. However this learning was not without trial. Maria, in the vignette, *Eat your greens* illustrated the experience for those students entering formal music study with limited academic skills and a lack of familiarity with traditional academic expectations. Maria's story highlighted the great challenge of a habitus that involved relatively low formal educational capital. Educational fields tend to expect that students already possess fundamental academic skills and ought to be able to demonstrate these skills when and as appropriate. However the vignette explored how this is simply not the case for many students entering formal tertiary education. Maria was finally able to accrue the necessary skills and achieve the required learning outcomes. However this was only achieved

through a combination of her resilience and perseverance and teaching that acknowledged and managed her limited academic capital. These efforts and outcomes illustrate the ability of individuals to succeed within a given field despite lacking the necessary knowledge expected. Maria effectively challenged and 'broke' the cycle that argues that those without sufficient capital cannot succeed within that field. Maria disrupted the narrative that students with limited educational experiences and low level skills cannot succeed in a formal tertiary academic environment.

Research has shown that agency and capacity can be accrued through academic achievement (see Burt et al., 2007). Maria's story illustrated how personal agency can be developed through the acknowledgement of challenges and fears. By speaking up and asking me for help, Maria acknowledged that she had the *right* to be helped. Maria was then able to build intellectual prowess and thus develop the power to find evidence and arguments to support her ideas and opinions about music and so become a more confident communicator. Ultimately the vignette highlighted the development of a powerful sense of self despite a series of significant challenges.

Burt et al. (2007, p. 304) have acknowledged that students can be 'keen to embrace new intellectual challenges and broaden their knowledge'. Academic learning helped my participants to see themselves as successful learners - a significant achievement given the many prior challenges in the academic environment. Learning to locate and use credible information to argue for ideas and to describe the musical self contributed enormously to the development of agency in the institutional and musical fields. My students were able to develop the power to speak and be heard more clearly.

8.4.5. Agency and self-identity in music making

Green (2006) contrasted the importance of informal activities that focused on creativity with formal music education components that tended to demand simple repetition. Indeed, participants revelled in exploring their musical selves through creating and experimenting with new and interesting sounds. They strived to construct their musical worlds with the elements and ideas that interested them. Making and creating music allowed these students to take

active responsibility for music choices and presentations rather than passively responding to the music directions of others. Independent music exploration was crucial to the development of the musical self, the autonomous and powerfully individual musician able to think, make and act for themselves. As Deutsch (2010, p. 68) asserted 'composition intrinsically entails choice, and choice inevitably empowers students.' Green (2006) highlighted the role of freedom of musical choice in informal music practices and contrasted this with traditional formal music education contexts where repertoire is often strictly directed. Like the participants in this study who clearly valued music composition opportunities, Papageorgi et al. (2010) found that students responded positively to courses that fostered the opportunities for students to explore and create music independently.

Freedom of musical choice in repertoire assisted participants to find their place and space in the music education field, as well as in their own musical worlds. Locating the individual in the collective musical landscape involved trying new things, sometimes failing, but also finding musical creations that possessed personal meaning and joy. Individual musical agency developed through testing and breaking music rules and expectations. Participants become active autonomous music makers by developing their own musical choices and approaches. Burt et al. (2007) found that the development of independence in all learning contexts contributed to more effective and enjoyable experiences on tertiary music education. Lebler (2007, 2009) has detailed how student engagement and educational and vocational benefits arose from self-directed approaches to music making being embedded in tertiary music courses. Green (2006, p. 113) has argued that when students explored and made music under informal conditions, they brought 'inherent meanings into being and are able to imbue the music with a new delineated content of their own'. Green (2006, p. 114), perhaps invoking Bourdieu's criticisms of education's inherent prioritisation of form over function, has queried whether there is too much concentration on the form and style of the music (the 'product') as opposed to 'the process of music making.'

The vignette, *I just don't get it* explored how students can question and challenge curricular content. Students voiced criticisms of curriculum that was

theoretical in nature and unsuited to their musical habitus. Students developed the agency to assist in developing a part of the curriculum that responded better to their musical tastes and needs. The story shows how students can question and test the legitimacy of music works that form the western canon of art traditionally used as the basis of music education. Bourdieu, Lamont and Moore have, in different ways, explored reconceptualisations for valuing musical repertoire and music making in the teaching of music (Bourdieu, 1977, Bourdieu, 1986, Lamont, 2011, Moore, 2012).

Participants clearly valued and enjoyed opportunities for making music and sounds that expressed their own music tastes, experiences and ideas. These contexts allowed for the expression of musical habitus and involved a practical and functional purpose. Original and self-directed music making helped to achieve a sense of creative and musical legitimacy. Compositional techniques sometimes meant that students were encouraged to break music conventions (the 'rules') in order to create new musical ideas. Creative and musical function became valued in addition to the form of music. Composition and improvisation experiences illustrated agents' subjective and autonomous actions. Improvisation allowed students to play off or outside of the music score. Improvising represented extensions to the musical product. Whilst the music score determined what students should play, improvisation and musical exploration allowed for movement beyond the constraints to make new music. This music activity can be analogised as socially (and educationally) determinant life scores, where students were able to improvise to move beyond and outside of pre-determined paths.

8.4.6. Legitimacy via learning

The achievement of effective learning equated to a kind of legitimisation for students. Meeting learning requirements constituted formal entry into legitimate musicianship. Testamurs implied students had 'made the grade' and were now accepted members of the wider music field. This was important because even though many participants enjoyed music and had had many pleasurable and effective music experiences they had struggled with perceptions that they were 'just players' of 'hobbyists'. Mantie (2013, p. 50) commented that 'the ability to

participate in legitimate forms of music making (i.e. the kinds of practices present in higher education) is an additional, arguably superior, form of social, cultural and educational capital.' Mantie (2013, p. 54) explored tensions between student backgrounds and the curricular priorities within a localised music education context and concluded that 'to the extent that institutions of higher education underwrite some music practices rather than others, they participate in processes of social stratification.' The choice by my participants to study music was, in one way, an attempt to become legitimated by meeting the standards set by the institution and by society that demanded a formal accrual of music skills and knowledge. This can be conceptualised as a kind of desire for acceptance of the person as musician. The process was particularly poignant for participants who had had experienced perceptions of illegitimacy but who were also, somewhat paradoxically, striving to celebrate and affirm their own sense of musical identity and value.

Maria, in the vignette, *Eat your greens* was clearly delighted at having 'made the grade' and enjoyed the feeling of working hard to build skills previously avoided and shunned. Maria effectively changed the perception of herself as an *illegitimate* student (one who did not possess the required skills and knowledge, unwelcome or unsuited to an academic environment) to a *legitimate* student, capable of accruing and demonstrating the necessary educational capital. This legitimisation is further acknowledged through the formal positive assessment of her academic skills. And yet Maria clearly did not necessarily 'like' the process, reserving a certain scepticism of the legitimate learning processes. The vignette *It's a long road* symbolised the distance students are prepared to go (physically, personally and academically) to become legitimate.

However, for participants in this research, the attempts to achieve educational legitimacy did not tell the whole story. An important corollary was the ability for students to learn to assess and value their own musical prowess, journey and learning; in essence to legitimise the self by the self. (Burt et al., 2007) identified the trust and importance that students bestowed in self-reflection and Lebler (2008) the importance of music education that fostered the ability for students to evaluate their own progress, explore challenges and opportunities and make decisions about how they might best negotiate the field.

The vignette *The juggler* explored perceptions of legitimacy in the music academic field. Through reflection and questioning I explored my place and value just as ‘anyone in front of a classroom could ponder (these types of) reflective questions’ (Läänemets et al., 2012, p. 31). Acknowledging educational capital deficits and tensions between my habitus and the field led to anxiety and a sense of inadequacy. However the testing of these positions (‘but then I think, hang on...’) began a process of self-legitimation. My achievements, work and contributions outlined in the vignette represented capability and prowess despite the pondering apprehensions throughout the story. The vignette highlighted the importance of honest and ongoing reflexive practice in addition to formal and external legitimising processes existent in the educational field. Pelias (2003) also explored his circulating tensions and anxieties as an academic; of never being able to complete with assurance and comfort the myriad of tasks and expectations required. And yet, like my narrative, there was a palpable sense of relief throughout his writing, *as if writing per se* released some of the tension and provided a process of validation. Indeed, the autoethnographic reflection of my story now serves as part of a thesis that provides some release from tensions and fears. Fitting in and ‘passing muster’ is part of the process of formal legitimisation in educational fields but I agree with Reed-Danahay (2009, p. 43) that those inside of institutions are also ‘struggling with, and at times resisting, the structural constraints within which they must negotiate their professional lives.’

8.4.7. Effective learning conditions

Participants appreciated aspects of curriculum and teaching that emphasised and prioritised substantial quantities of time. Taking time to learn more closely resembled habitus imbued with practical and unstructured learning and music making. Most were accustomed to and hence valued *slow* learning where thought, engagement and activity were unrushed. They responded positively to teaching conditions that allowed the time to be creative, to process and apply information and to overcome challenges. Students appreciated learning that was analogous to playing in *the right groove, with the right time and feel*.

Sufficient time to learn equated to having the time to explore, investigate, test and even fail – conditions that assisted the developing of the autonomous and creative musician. ‘Not being pushed’ meant having the space to lead one’s own direction, to actively pursue their own ideas rather than passively respond to external insurances. Green (2007) has highlighted the importance of assimilating skills and knowledge in personal, often haphazard ways as part of music curricula and pedagogy. Teaching incorporating student music preferences and whole ‘real-world’ music compared favourably with formal music education that tended to involve a directed approach to the rigid structure of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.

Smaller class size created the environment for effective teaching for the participants in this research. Teachers had the space and opportunity to get to know students’ habitus and develop closer relationships with students. Student habitus was more readily acknowledged and accommodated. Limited class sizes led to participatory learning conditions and to more ‘hands on’ attention from teachers. These environments inevitably reflected characteristics more closely associated with community or informal music making contexts. These conditions were in stark contrast to the large lecture theatres traditionally associated with formal educational environments where the physical and metaphorical distance between teacher and learner is accentuated. Greater contact hours, more time on campus, extra tutorials and other extensions and priorities of time generated feelings of ease and comfort for students. Release from the constraints and limitations of the timetabled ‘school bell’ mentality led to osmotic music learning of the kind associated with community and informal music contexts, prior to and outside of formal music education.

Characters from the vignettes such as John, Maria and Melanie benefited greatly from time provided to raise and discuss fears and anxieties. Unrushed exchanges allowed students and teachers to work together, and over time, to manage challenges and become more positive, aware, and engaged.

Effective course structures were clearly an important part of participant perceptions of effective learning conditions. Curricular framework is analogous to song structure, where all parts work together and are balanced. Students praised course structures that offered a wide variety of units beginning at an

introductory level. Course design and level was thus able to better accommodate educational and musical habitus. Whilst courses tended to scaffold more specific explicit academic expectations, students still identified the importance of choice and an emphasis on holistic music education. Flexibility and breadth within the curriculum catered for students who came to study with a general interest and experience with a wide variety of music genres and practices and who wanted to explore and learn more about music generally. Pitts (2012) has argued that courses offering a wide range of skills and knowledge across music are more likely to be viewed as effective and constructive learning environments. Curricular structure and approach contributed to both the quality and quantity of learning for participants. Broad curricula allowed students to gain music skills and knowledge in a number of areas they identified as important for moving into a career in music. For example, specific music knowledge was able to be incorporated into band activities. One participant, Iggy, had found functional harmony challenging throughout the course but later reflected that being able to choose and substitute a greater variety of chords resulted in more interesting and creative arrangements for his band's music. The acquisition of technical skills, such as operating live performance equipment, illustrated the importance of relevant music skills and knowledge, relatable to future career contexts. The ability to recognise and practise effective pedagogical skills during study was particularly important for students who wanted to enter music teaching.

Education student participants undertaking music majors elicited many positive views of the music component of their studies, in addition to the many challenges explored in the previous chapter. That they had been welcomed into music study with little or no prior formal music learning was both a blessing and a curse. Whilst the curriculum and teaching struggled to accommodate their habitus they had been at least able to explore their passion for music by studying music at university. Despite the struggle to overcome musical and academic challenges and feeling unprepared for music teaching most education students successfully completed the music units and, interestingly, admitted a sense of pride and joy at having 'got through'. Achievements under these circumstances represented a real spirit of resilience.

8.4.8. Relevance

The relevance of aspects of music study to prior and external musical activities were reflective of some close alignments between curriculum, pedagogy and student habitus. Those participants who had completed both a music degree and the graduate diploma in (music) education felt ready and confident for music teaching. Hargreaves and Marshall (2003, p. 270) explored the transitions of music education students to early career music teacher and reported that those with high levels of practical music skills and a tertiary music degree saw themselves as capable in a range of musical and social/teaching skills areas. It is unsurprising that other participants who came to study with low level practical skills and who were not able to complete a music degree that allowed more time and tuition to build music skills would feel unprepared and unconfident.

Graduate participants beginning to undertake substantial music careers reported the skills and knowledge they had gained in the music courses were highly applicable to their work. Kyrie declared that 'music at VU has formed my life as a musician'. Others described musical lives where they applied the *theory* learned at university to *doing* outside of university, or 'knowledge applied'. Music knowledge filtered into band activity and there was genuine appreciation for teachers who took an interest in their music activities and pursuits outside of university. Acknowledgements of the relevancy of study point to significant intersections between formal music learning and external music activities, where cultural music capital and participant habitus are in close alignment.

Lebler et al. (2009) argued that tertiary music curriculum and pedagogy needs to engender the broad range of skills, such as self-direction and self-evaluation, flexibility and adaptability, required for successful negotiation of the music industry. Burt and Mills (2006, p. 434) have argued:

'In a highly competitive industry, musicians need to possess more than simply exceptional levels of technical skill. Music courses in higher education need to equip students with extra-music skills relating to self-management and communication, and embedding such skills within the curriculum will ensure that students acquire the personal and

psychological tools to progress into a career (musical or otherwise) after graduation.'

8.4.9. Flourishing through effective music pedagogy

Effective and engaging music teaching constituted the basis for much of the positive 'release' experiences of participants. The links between inclusive, flexible, thoughtful and engaged music teaching and effective learning have been widely explored and demonstrated in a range of educational settings (see for example Deutsch (2010), Burnard et al. (2008) and Pearsall (2009). The participants in my study corroborate the experiences of students in much of the literature in describing effective music teaching. Students developed and flourished when teaching was able to vary tempo and dynamic to accommodate different learning styles and needs.

Teachers who introduced 'real life' knowledge and learning into the classroom appealed to students whose habitus was more attuned to music making and doing. Students appreciated teachers who were able to demonstrate musically what they taught theoretically. Personalised and flexible teaching acknowledged the highly individual and idiosyncratic habitus of students. Students appreciated teachers who were sensitive to students' individual learning styles (based on an awareness of musical and educational habitus). Flexible and accommodating teaching validated the backgrounds, preferences, and ways of understanding of students. Läänemets et al. (2012) found that students responded positively to teaching approaches that valued all students' individual learning needs alike. Teachers who made the effort to understand the interests, music choices and skill levels were able to connect learning materials and approaches to habitus. Mills (2008, p. 84) concluded that 'by broadening the types of cultural capital that are valued in the classroom...teachers can act as agents of transformation rather than reproduction.'

Students appreciated teachers who tailored feedback to the individual student by acknowledging their unique learning nature, challenges and needs. Students were thus assisted in identifying and overcoming their own challenges. This process involved teachers observing, synthesising, acknowledging and acting upon the individual habitus of each student rather than simply assuming that all

students required the same feedback, advice and intervention. Kiik-Salupere and Ross (2011) have likewise argued that effective teaching included the ability to tailor feedback to align more closely with individual (idiosyncratic) student activities, goals and careers.

Effective teaching was epitomised by the efforts and skills of KJ in the vignette, *Above and beyond*. KJ represented the archetypal caring, passionate and capable teacher. KJ's efforts resulted in student engagement and achievement despite institutional constraints and deficit formal music capital of students. KJ's thoughtfulness and action for the students illustrated a pedagogical paradigm that conceives and treats students as people, rather than numbers. The vignette highlighted the value of teaching what is *needed* rather than what is *directed*. KJ might have reasonably expected students to be at a certain level and capable of succeeding within the time and conditions imposed. However, it transpired that students were struggling with the institutional constraints. KJ observed the situation and acted to ameliorate the situation with generosity of spirit and care for the students. KJ saw the students as individuals who both needed and deserved more than the institution was able or willing to provide, and made a decision to provide this. The story symbolises a teaching philosophy of care, wisdom and empathy that results in acknowledged students. Pitts (2009, p. 254) praised teachers like KJ as 'influential mentors who recognise and affirm the developing interests of their students, nourishing a sense of musical identity and providing opportunities for the acquisition of skills and the growth of confidence.'

Recalling the recollections of participants to my inquiry, these kinds of teachers 'are remembered fondly where their own passion for music was evident, spreading enthusiasm and offering a role model for aspiring musicians. At their best, they are inspiring, nurturing and apparently tireless' (Pitts, 2009, p. 254).

Participants were able to develop greater musical and academic skills and knowledge in part due to dedicated, passionate and capable teaching staff employing effective, flexible and thoughtful teaching. Kiik-Salupere and Ross (2011, p. 405), exploring the perceptions of effective student learning experiences in instrumental teaching, highlighted 'the importance of the ability of teachers to inspire, motivate and captivate their students while teaching their subject'. Participants identified many teachers who had been able to inspire

them to work hard and succeed in challenging learning contexts. They benefited from well-structured and relevant teaching involving carefully prepared assessment tasks, criteria and clearly articulated expectations and standards. Deutsch (2010) has identified the importance of tailored music composition curriculum to the requirements of each student. Freer (2008) outlined the benefits of individual student learning using broadly constructivist approaches to teaching, in part through modifying and choosing language appropriate to each student's level, goals, ideas and feedback. Such pedagogical approaches rely upon teachers listening to and understanding each student in order to align language and instruction to accommodate this habitus.

Teaching that provided the opportunity for students to independently explore and create, aligned to participant backgrounds of self-directed and experiential learning. Green (2006) found secondary school music students identified and acknowledged self-directed learning opportunities where the teachers employed more 'hands off' learning contexts. Burt et al. (2007) argued that learning environments that encouraged students to reflect upon experiences in positive perspectives and to problem solve in a self-directed manner were likely to lead to better outcomes for students.

Good teachers and effective teaching contributed to the well-being of participants. Passionate, interested and enthusiastic teachers made students feel cared for and supported as individuals. Kind and amicable teachers treated students as though they belonged in the classroom community. Likewise, Läänemets et al. (2012) found secondary students valued friendliness and optimism as contributing to student enjoyment and learning effectiveness. Seale (2010) identified the importance tertiary music education students placed on supportive tutors. Participants who developed close, amicable relationships with teachers recognised these relationships resembled the kind of mentor/mentee relationships they had experienced in community and informal music making fields. Burt et al. (2007) established that students valued highly the approachability and concern shown by teachers within a music department, particularly for students new to the department. Positive and effective teacher/student relationships operated on the basis of mutual respect and reciprocity and resulted in participants developing a sense of maturity and self-

worth (Burt et al., 2007). Kiik-Salupere and Ross (2011, p. 406) have argued that encouraging student confidence and self-belief is based on the development of strong teacher/student relationships involving 'mutual trust and confidence.'

Kiik-Salupere and Ross (2011, p. 417) concluded that 'students expectations of teachers are related to inspiring, encouraging and motivating'. Participants in my research were inspired by teaching that created a sense of purpose and expectation that the required learning goals could be achieved. Learning in this environment was the joyous pursuit of knowledge in music rather than a chore or an irksome task to be 'ticked off'. Burwell (2005) found that students often gained similar confidence and engagement from instrumental teachers. (Gaunt, 2010) highlighted the benefits of teaching that accommodated failure and the concomitant problem solving and management that went along with this. Many participant comments about teachers related to feelings of belonging, safety and community.

The story of KJ in *Above and beyond* illustrated how teachers who work to learn about the character and capabilities, limitations and challenges of students are able to cater effectively for them. In the vignette, the knowledge and care of the teacher resulted in students receiving the necessary quantity and quality of teaching. The story illustrates the flourishing that can occur for students provided with flexible, attentive and personalised teaching.

8.5. The role of a music education community

*'Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends,
Mm, I get high with a little help from my friends,
Oh, I'm gonna try with a little help from my friends'*

['With a little help from my friends', The Beatles](#)

Social and academic characteristics associated with the notion of community were seen as valuable aspects of participant experiences. Features of community present in formal learning contexts allowed for the development of identity and well-being, friendship, belonging and support and informal but effective learning opportunities. Community characteristics involved singing

together in tune or in harmony, the *choir* collectively engaging in a musical call and response.

Parker (2010, p. 340 citing McMillan and Chavis 1986) proposed that community consisted of four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and a shared emotional connection'. Parker (2010, p. 340) added 'shared emotional connection as well as the give and take of relationships between individuals' in defining community.

Jeanneret and Brown (2012) have explored how supportive community environments foster effective learning. Students in VU music courses hailed from a wide variety of backgrounds but were often able to work together positively and effectively. These circumstances resonated with music experiences in informal music making of social connectedness and a spirit of shared enthusiasm and collaboration. Different backgrounds were often able to be acknowledged by other students. Students embraced exposure to styles of music and music activities they had been unfamiliar with. A spirit of inclusion and acceptance permeated the student body at times which lent an air of legitimacy to prior experiences and musical dispositions. Students acknowledged when competitiveness and negative judgement were absent as being similar to the atmosphere experienced in many prior music communities and contexts.

Friendship and support were integral to the overall well-being of participants. The care students showed for one another contributed to an atmosphere of belonging and helped to create a sense of community. Students made connections with people they may not have otherwise come to know, in the same way as they did in bands, church music groups and community choirs. Chatting and eating in the student lounge and playing in rehearsal rooms and studios made being at university more like 'hanging out' with friends and just making music. One participant described her experience of the music department as being 'in the right place'. Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007, p. 99) identified that feelings of importance and usefulness within group contexts were also associated with a strong sense of belonging. Seale (2010) found that students who contributed and supported one another contributed to more positive reflections of study experiences. The participant in Parker (2010, p.

346) research who intoned that choir members 'rely on each other' presented a clear illustration of a strong learning community and culture.

The development of some very close and long lasting friendships was testament to the special importance of like-minded and co-spirited individuals creating, learning and doing together in the same place. Burt et al. (2007) found similar positive reflections in participants who were excited about the prospect of learning with other students who shared a passion for music. Many of my participants mentored one another, helping each other to overcome challenges and solve problems. They worked together to produce inspired and accomplished musical outcomes demonstrating collaboration and united effort. The minimal presence of negative judgement helped participants to feel less pressured about musical achievements and, again, resembled the non-competitive, supportive, environments of more informal learning contexts. In such circumstances participants grew more confident in their musical abilities. Burt et al. (2007) found that students in the first year of a tertiary music education course identified their fellow students as a central part of the learning experience. Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007) discussed the personal and social benefits of involvement in music environments where participants felt as though they were contributing individually to a group outcome to develop a personal sense of social place and relevance. Mantie (2013) found group music making in formal education contexts became a way for students to achieve a sense of enjoyment, belonging and satisfaction.

The student lounge provided a delightful glimpse into the friendships and support amongst the students. Students cooked for one another, shared favourite music, helped one another with assignments and laughed and joked around together.

Many students acknowledged that they learned formally and informally from one another. Like the participants in the study by Lebler (2008, p. 205), who found 'inspiration in one another', my participants looked to their peers for new music ideas, experiences and opportunities. Students in VU music courses were drawn from a number of different backgrounds, with varied skill sets and ages. Younger students sometimes sought the musical experience and depth of music knowledge from older students. More mature students relished the

enthusiasm and exploration of younger students. Students exchanged knowledge and insight into new technological developments and suggested tips and tricks to inform and contribute to music performance and composition. Some formed more formal mentoring relationships. Learning often became a collaborative and interactive experience and enabled participants to 'get through' challenges and ultimately thrive in an academic environment. Formal *and* informal music learning and knowledge exchange contributed positively to the overall accrual of music capital. The benefits of student mentoring and other informal learning in creative and music education contexts have been demonstrated in a number of contexts (see for example Baker (2007) and Kafai et al. (2008)).

Identification of personal development within community conditions in formal music education illustrated the growth of personal agency and identity. Participants grew to understand the musical and academic prowess they were developing. Students matured to develop a sense of capability, ability and the belief they could achieve goals and succeed in a study environment. Likewise, Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007) found that participation in music learning such as ensemble classes led to personal growth in self-assurance.

The community of music making and learning assisted students to build a sense the musical *and* personal self. This is the type of development that allowed participants, like Belinda for example, to reflect on how far she and her fellow students had come as students and musicians and as human beings.

Baker (2007) recounted the collaborative experiences of young marginalised people (with similar habitus to participants in my study) in developing agency through involvement in youth radio. Similarly, *The student lounge* vignette highlighted the power of the student body to challenge the authority and structures of the university. The staff members who assisted in the cause were also testing the institutional constraints, exploring opportunities despite challenges and achieving positive outcomes in the face of limitations. The ultimate success in bringing an important and shared idea to fruition exemplified the power and potential of collective efforts by a community to engender change through disruption and subversion.

Personal development occurred through collective participation in music education learning and activities. Kyrie felt he 'matured as an individual' during his time in the course. Jordan reflected upon the intersection of his growing personal interest in political and ideological issues and cultural perspectives he was learning in the course. He concluded that both these informal and formal areas of learning were integral to his development as an 'adult'. Other participants considered that learning and musical engagement in formal music studies taught them 'about the self, not *only* as a musician'. Some acknowledged that 'growing' up in a community of like-minded individuals contributed to their understanding of their place in society. Iggy took a leave of absence halfway through his studies, packed his car with a guitar and CD's he had recorded and produced and took off around Australia to play and sell music, and to 'see the world'. This journey embodied a sense of confidence and adventure engendered through learning and enjoying study and building social skills and a stable sense of self.

Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007) reported upon students who perceived they had developed a range of personal characteristics through music learning, particularly within collective music contexts. These students reflected that they had grown in their problem solving and negotiation skills, independence, diligence, self-assurance, reliability and maturity. Overall, group music making assisted in the students gaining a clearer perception of their identities as musicians and students. Pulman (2010) identified the potential for collaborative music making environments to contribute to learning about self through collective reflection and discussion.

Community environments contributed to the identification of well-being in participant experiences. Students displayed confidence and resilience in the face of challenges and worked together and supported one another to achieve, succeed and learn. They were able to create the conditions closely associated with 'community' settings where they felt safe and 'at home'. Students found or built contexts where they felt a sense of harmony that equated to being in the 'right' or legitimate place. Students were thus more able to flourish as music makers and learners.

The participants rarely described wider University experiences in terms of community, but rather referred to being part of separate 'little' 'self-contained community'. Studying in the VU music community meant: rehearsing and performing in ensemble groups with other musicians; hanging out with class mates, discussing music and going out to gigs after class; doing most of the same classes together; eating and chatting in the student lounge or cafe; helping one another with homework tasks or forming informal study groups; incorporating anyone who came to study music, even from other courses or parts of the university, into the community; and creating and participating in all kinds of informal music activities. These experiences created 'a family' and helped students to feel like they 'belonged' to 'our own community'. This strong sense of belonging, support, and collaboration mirrored prior and informal music making experiences and contributed to enjoyment and flourishing. For many, the experience of belonging to a community (within a formal music study context) was in contrast to the experience of other areas of the university where friends were harder to come by and learning seemed more remote.

Of particular note were the music education students who, despite experiencing possibly the greatest challenges in completing formal music study, drew an enormous amount of comfort and enjoyment from their inclusion in the VU music community. This sense of inclusion and support enabled this cohort to build the necessary resilience to work together to overcome the significant challenges of completing their learning successfully.

It is clear that those characteristics of formal music study that most closely mirrored community music contexts contributed to a sense of well-being for participants studying music. Lebler (2007, p. 202) demonstrated how formal institutional environments could act as a community of practice and argued that 'creative work is supported through the encouragement of a sense of community in which feedback is exchanged between students as a matter of normal practice.' Papageorgi et al. (2010) explored how a vibrant and energetic popular music degree in UK with a wide range of informal, community orientated collaborative activities was very attractive for potential students. Informal music making inherently occurs within group contexts (Green, 2007) so it is not surprising that students responded to collective and collaborative

activities in formal music that mirrored informal and prior community music making activities.

The party described a joyous and friendly environment where students from the same formal learning environment came together to celebrate achievements and enjoy one another's company. This occasion was one of many that highlighted the extent of friendship and support that existed for many participants in formal music study. The party was a poignant illustration of community spirit and circumstance.

8.6. Coda: Concluding comments

Tensions arose from constrained and misaligned habitus and the struggle to accrue music capital. Pressures accompanied reduced agency and a lack of enjoyment and engagement with the study environment. However, tensions were released when these challenges were absent or resolved. In circumstances where backgrounds, choices and preferences were acknowledged and accommodated habitus became legitimated and participants experienced the relief of belonging and acceptance. In such contexts students were then able to test, explore, question and challenge. In doing so, they developed agency and autonomy within formal learning processes experienced as an authoritative release from the constraints of powerlessness. Many participants achieved learning goals and overcame challenges to meet learning requirements and so experienced a powerful relief and pride in achievements. Agentic and acknowledged learners became confident, resilient, self-assured and self-aware members of music and learning communities. They flourished as students and musicians. The characteristics associated with a sense of well-being provided welcome release from alienation, anxiety and tension experienced in constrained and powerless conditions.

In-depth analysis of participant backgrounds and journeys of their formal music education has revealed potential circumstances for release. Participants felt legitimated when their backgrounds and experiences were more closely aligned with the conditions of the field. They became known, acknowledged and celebrated. Students felt proud and satisfied when they were able to acknowledge learning and achievement, particularly in practical contexts. They

developed power as autonomous agents as they explored, tested and voiced their musical selves. The participants flourished as they worked together in shared interests, and supported and cared for one another. Students developed confidence and found strength to meet and overcome the challenges of formal study.

‘Release’ experiences correlated to conditions closely aligned with community contexts, the places and spaces where young musicians had first discovered and nurtured their love for music making and doing. Journeys came full circle as students flourished in the supportive, functional, flexible and autonomous areas of formal music education. These were the very same circumstances participants identified as important and desirable in informal music education contexts. These findings align to the initial research questions for this thesis. The outcomes meet research aims regarding contributions to music education and to research structure and design in qualitative research in music education. It has been enlightening to discover the value of the student voice and likewise the significance of the exploring my own voice. Voice allowed the habitus to be discovered, understood, acknowledged and celebrated. Voice assisted students to attain agency and became active learners. Participants sang about challenges and successes, tension and release. The use of voice and story in research has helped me to effectively reflect on teaching, learning and doing music – and how we might all do that more effectively. The methodology was effective, celebratory and inclusive. The outcomes are entirely useful for the future design of music curriculum and pedagogy.

The next, and final, chapter presents a summary of the findings of this inquiry. The chapter also discusses outcomes relating to current and future music education research method and design. The thesis then concludes with a series of recommendations for teaching and learning in tertiary music.

Chapter 9. **Coda: Conclusions and recommendations**

9.1. Prelude

[Symphony no. 3 in E Flat major, opus 55, 'Eroica', Ludwig Van Beethoven](#)

9.1.1. Research questions, aims and methodology

Some time ago I attended a conference in Brisbane and listened to passionate music educators and researchers speak about their ideas for more effective and engaging tertiary music education. A range of innovative and creative approaches to music teaching and learning were presented. I was inspired by these exciting and interesting ideas and I started to think about what I might be able to change and improve in my work. It struck me though that if I wanted to do a better job teaching the music students at my university, then I really needed to know a lot more about them. This research was ignited by an interest in exploring students' experiences in local music cultures and communities and their transition to, and journeys through, formal music education.

Over time I had observed that many music students lacked motivation and often exhibited signs of alienation, frustration or boredom. It appeared that some students felt disengaged from the music education environment and their studies. I wanted to explore why this was, particularly when these students were immersed in music – the very thing that was meant to be exciting and enjoyable for them?

9.1.2. Questions and aims

I set out to find:

- What students' experiences were prior to entering tertiary music study
- What music students' experiences were as they moved from their local music cultures and communities into a formal institution
- What challenges music students faced in formal tertiary music education
- Why music students felt alienated and disengaged in formal music education

- How prior and out of school experiences affected students' participation in their music education.

I aimed specifically to:

- Deduce the reasons why some tertiary music students did not appear to enjoy or connect with their music studies
- Provide new knowledge about student backgrounds and learning experiences to inform tertiary music education
- Contribute to the exploration of qualitative research in music education.

9.1.3. Methodologies used

As a university music lecturer and coordinator I was familiar with a wide range of generic quantitative research and evaluation undertaken in the tertiary sector and within my own university. I understood the general purpose and nature of this type of enquiry, but I was sceptical about the ability of this data to provide sufficiently clear or thorough answers to the kinds of specific questions outlined above. It struck me just how little I and the university really knew about *individual* students. Amidst the student surveys and extensive policies and planning around student engagement and experience, where were the *student* voices?

I decided that a qualitative investigation, incorporating interviews and focus group discussions could ensure the voices and stories of music students were heard. I reasoned this narrative approach could be enhanced by exploring my own voice, as a key participant in the music education experiences of the students.

It has been fascinating, highly informative and immensely gratifying to undertake this process of discovering the individual stories of participants and testing and questioning my own teacher/researcher narrative. The findings have clarified answers to the initial research questions. Results of the investigation inform specific recommendations for music teaching and learning at Victoria University and contribute to thinking about future tertiary music education more generally. Findings from the research process contribute to possibilities for future investigations into music education.

9.2. Summary of findings

9.2.1. The habitus of Victoria University music students

Participants were drawn to music through family and community experiences. The participant habitus was cultivated through functional informal music activities accompanied by the agency to decide the nature and extent of musical play. Participants voiced many common aspects of music experience but shared different and individual stories of their musical selves. They flourished in informal and self-directed music contexts, but tended to manifest anxiety (or 'tensions') when creativity or musical activity was constrained. Limitation tended to be characterised by a priority of formulaic over practical aspects of music. Many participants struggled to accrue music capital in secondary education contexts where music curriculum and teaching was either greatly under resourced or focused only on music making rather than music learning. Conversely, participants learned much from community music opportunities where the learning tended to be informal and functional in nature. Music students in this inquiry came to university with a passion to pursue music, but tended to lack the formal (or 'legitimate') cultural, music, capital expected in a commencing tertiary music student.

9.2.2. Tensions in the music student experience

Participants experienced a range of tensions in their negotiation of formal tertiary music education fields. Anxiety, powerlessness, alienation and disillusionment manifested due to misalignments between the participant habitus and the field dynamics they were attempting to negotiate. The predominantly functional habitus of students, characterised by the interest in creating and *producing* music was challenged by the emphasis on *(re)producing* music capital required by the formal education field. Pressures arose where form was prioritised over function and where the nature of the institutional environment eclipsed the characteristics of the informal music communities students hailed from. Participants possessed limited cultural (music) capital and struggled to meet the academic expectations of the tertiary music field. Participants struggled to gain a sense of legitimacy and agency within the

established hierarchical structures of formal music education. These tensions manifested in powerlessness, anxiety disappointment and disengagement for many participants at various stages of their formal music education experiences.

9.2.3. Releases in the music student experience

However, participants also experienced a range of positive, or release, aspects in formal music education fields. They were relatable to times and spaces in their music education where habitus was accommodated or acknowledged. Many eventually accrued relatively high levels of formal music learning. They discovered new musical ideas and tested the boundaries of music and academic fields. Participants established various degrees of autonomy and personal agency, and, at times, were able to challenge the hierarchical structures and processes of formal tertiary education. Participants shared personal stories and developed strong and clear voices that rose above the background noise of the tertiary music education soundscape. Participants grew, adapted to and developed new and different musical and academic habitus to disrupt the notion of a fixed, or inferior, disposition within the field dynamics. These releases were borne in part from the creativity, resilience and individual efforts of students and resulted in experiences of joy, belonging and community spirit in formal music education settings.

9.2.4. Local stories/global context

The habitus of participants in this research, and the tensions and releases of their formal music education experiences, were corroborated in global music and music education contexts. Important similarities between the experiences of participants in this study were mirrored in investigations into musicians and music students in other parts of Australia and internationally. There are important lessons to be learned from such explorations and comparisons. However the stories forming the basis of my local research are told by a specific group of individuals from a self-described 'University of Opportunity'. Other investigations have predominantly occurred within 'first choice', highly ranked institutions looking at students with different educational backgrounds

possessing richer reserves of music (cultural) capital. My research has highlighted other, less well publicised stories. Findings have provided specific and localised recommendations for effective teaching and learning in the tertiary music education conditions, for a *particular* student cohort. Flexible and idiosyncratic *research* thus epistemologically mirrors the *teaching and learning* required by particular groups of students. Findings from my investigations have contributed to qualitative inquiry as ‘political, radical, democratic and interventionist’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 11).

9.3. Reflexivity and ethnographic enquiry

Findings arose from qualitative research incorporating ethnographic enquiry into the student experience, investigating student habitus and the negotiation of habitus through educational fields. Autoethnographic enquiry unpacked writing about self and the journey of the researcher through the research. Both investigative approaches involved reflexivity. As participants reflected on musical histories, journeys and identities, I was able to reflect upon my background and experiences as a musician, teachers and researcher.

The reflexive investigation into my experiences has produced important results in addition to those outlined from analysis of participant data. Reflecting upon the vignettes created from years of diarising afforded space and time to explore my voice and identity. I was reminded of Erika Vasconcelos’ (2011, p. 416) autoethnographic enquiries and her search for ‘what has made me into the teacher that I am’. These excursions into me have become part of my journey *through* the research. The participant voices mixed with mine in a complex, uneven and at times, dissonant, musical score. There were liminal spaces, with little clear delineation, where the investigation and outcomes were neither theirs of mine, but rather, some messy intermingling of one another’s. The anxieties, fears, tensions, releases, breakthroughs and triumphs did not belong to the participants, or indeed to me, but were shared by us all. Our stories shared common themes with Manovski’s (2014) autethnographic thinking and writing into multiple identities in music and music education, leading to the discovery of voice, sense of self and agency.

Participants in this investigation experienced teachable moments (Havighurst, 1953). Students discovered and acknowledged personal characteristics through reflection and voicing their stories. They acquired music knowledge and experience. I eventually learned to express my voice, as I contemplated my writing and experiences. I re-wrote chapters of this thesis in order to assert this voice. I developed the voice that is asserted in the discussions and recommendations in this thesis. This voice has defended decisions about thesis structure and content and has admitted the need to approach the process of investigation and analysis in my own idiosyncratic way. Like the participants in this research, I overcame tensions in my habitus to find agency within the field I was negotiating. Despite challenges I too was able to accrue academic capital. These lessons came not in an ordered or logical way, but occurred to us all at different times, the 'right' times. This journey of teachable moments has provided important insights into how music students and musicians can and do learn.

There was value in exploring and releasing all the voices participating in this collaborative (community, choral) experience of music teaching and learning. Voices fostered guidance, self-direction and a sense of acceptance and acknowledgement. Thinking and acting upon the hopes, fears, anxieties and dreams of these voices can lead to significant change.

9.4. Recommendations for tertiary music education

'Form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union'.

[Frank Lloyd Wright](#)

9.4.1. Prelude

Music education needs to accommodate a balance between the functional habitus of musicians and the often formulaic dynamics of formal tertiary music contexts. Equilibrium needs to be established between the requirement of building music knowledge capital whilst ensuring growth in personal agency and well-being. Formal music education that prioritises an authentic attempt to discover, explore and act upon student habitus allows for such balances to be fostered. Music curriculum and pedagogy that reflexively responds to, and

attempts to accommodate, student habitus produces greater potential for more effective student learning and a greater sense of inclusion, legitimacy and well-being. Teaching, learning, musicking (and the ongoing investigation of these activities) that is deliberately and comfortably *participatory* leads to greater power and enfranchisement in *all* involved, resulting in the kind of 'spiritual union' that Wright refers to.

There are specific music teaching and learning conditions that assist in achieving balance, or union, between teacher and student, musician and institution, doer and knower. The following recommendations involve ideas that question much of the traditional and current thinking in tertiary education. Significant changes to thinking and doing in education represents powerful challenges to policy makers, institutions, educational managers, teachers and students. Deviations from traditional curricular and pedagogical wisdom, hierarchies of power, institutional processes and cultures, educational customs and economies of scale can be, indeed should be, confronting and disruptive. However, new ideas offer important opportunities for educators and institutions to do better, to be fairer and more ethical practitioners, and to make real improvements to what music students do and how they learn. The identification of dissatisfaction, disengagement and other significant negative dispositions within students warrant significant ameliorations to improve the student experience. A precondition to thinking in how music is taught at universities should involve accepting that the fundamental aim of tertiary music education is to create conditions where individuals flourish, engage and create. The epistemological approach that education and philosophy should be inextricably linked is not new. It is embodied in educational traditions such as the German 'bildung' (Levin and Greenwood, 2011). However, the prevalence of rationalist, neo-liberal cultures that are increasingly driving tertiary education policy and practice warrants continual reminders of the importance of democratic and participatory education objectives.

The notions of habitus and educational/music capital were used to frame and unpack participant experiences in community and institutional fields. Contested notions of agency were at play between habitus and field and in the attempts to teach and accrue capital. As I have posited, however, it is also relevant to view

participant journeys in the light of characteristics associated with well-being. Recommendations for music education revolve around the central notions of habitus, learning (capital), agency and well-being.

Whilst findings from this study are not specifically generisable I offer these recommendations as aspects to be considered by those creating and conducting the conditions for tertiary music education, in the spirit of forceful questioning of tertiary education called for by Levin and Greenwood (2011).

9.4.2. Acknowledging and accommodating the functional student habitus

Musicians seeking opportunities to study music at university tend to enter tertiary study with habitus rich in music making and doing. This is true of students coming to Victoria University, but appears to be mirrored also in students entering tertiary music at other institutions in Australia and internationally. Music students present with habitus rich in music function and practice whether or not backgrounds are associated with higher or lesser levels of (cultural) music capital.

Tertiary music curriculum must accommodate the functional habitus of musicians entering formal music study. Curricula need to provide a wide and substantial range of practical music subjects, where students have the time and space to engage actively with music making and doing. Where possible, subjects should allow for the functional interpretation and application of learned theoretical knowledge. Practical music units of study need to encompass the opportunity to create new and original work that allows for personal exploration of personal interests, tastes, ideas and styles. The requirement to reproduce canonical musical works nevertheless present opportunities for individual creative interpretation and arrangement. Curricula should foster informal music activities to augment formal scheduled music classes where students can engage in a wide range of self-directed music making. Pedagogical approaches need to promote, rather than merely tolerate, different styles of music, particularly those not belonging to the Western canons of music. Gould (2012, p. 79) described the music that musicians and music educators repeatedly revisit (like a musical refrain) as the 'Deleuzian refrain (which) is deterritorialized as music when strict musical forms are opened up and exceeded.'

Music students, as musicians do, make and create music. Music departments need to fight to remain functional, flexible and creative within institutional contexts. There needs to be active attempts to kick against formulaic and traditional 'one size fits all' educational conditions routinely imposed by universities in respect to standardised teaching conditions. Common institutional restraints such as the number and length of semesters; the number of units; maximum teaching hours; teaching ratios; rates of casual or part time staffing and student to teacher ratios should be questioned and evaluated as they relate to the learning conditions for musicians. Tertiary music curricula and pedagogies need to entail relatively high levels of flexibility and responsiveness, rather than being permanently fixed and rigid. As Gould (2012) noted:

'Content and achievement standards in music education, government and/or school board mandated curricula, and over-reliance on pre-planned, pre-determined pedagogical approaches all function in terms of the Deleuzian refrain as points of stability'.

Gould's analysis of the state of music education in the US, and the dogged insistence on tried, tested (but in many cases, failed) music curricula and pedagogies, illustrates a culture of defence in the face of repeated attacks on the legitimacy of music education within society, generally, and the education sector, more specifically. Levin and Greenwood (2011) point to the need to vehemently question and reform the nature of university teaching and research. Institutions mandating the implementation of endless frameworks in order to succeed in the education 'market' should be challenged as to how such policy making and the accompanying nomenclature, improves the individual student experience. The need to test the dominant free market rhetoric is paramount for music departments as they spiral to the outer edges of educational funding universes.

Tractability in music education entails more work for teachers and greater administrative and procedural challenges for institutions. However, the ability to respond effectively and nimbly to changing student needs and educational conditions would see music departments, and indeed institutions, viewed positively by prospective and current students – the 'market' that universities profess to be attracting and engaging in effective and high quality education.

Students have different, and ever changing, educational needs in the particular disciplines universities offer. Music departments, as with other discipline areas, need to advocate for the *specific* conditions of learning for musicians. Institutions need to listen to, and act upon, voices such as Johansen Johansen (2009) calling loudly for ‘education policy of the particular’ in the face of far-reaching attempts to generalise music education.

9.4.3. Space and time

‘I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn’.

Alfred Einstein

Students in this inquiry enjoyed and thrived in a wide range of musical communities. Formal learning spaces need to create and foster those characteristics and cultures associated with community spaces. Students should experience music departments as informal, inviting and comfortable rather than austere. Learning environments, like many music community spaces, could allow for a range of different activities, rather than specific and planned teaching activities concomitant with traditional notions of the classroom. This research asserts that curricula could reflect community music scenarios to deliberately allow for time in course structures and timetables for informal music making. It is noteworthy that as universities have scaled back teaching time (less years to complete a qualification, less weeks in the semester, fewer contact hours, less time to see tutors et al.) participants continually highlighted the benefits of extended time spent in music communities. Music departments need to provide similar temporal conditions so that students want to stay to play, explore, meet and chat rather than rushing off to do what they *really* want to do with music.

Music departments must allow more time for slow learning. It takes time to establish and hone technical skills and allow for the inception and percolating of ideas. Longer semesters, longer classes, time after class for informal discussions between students and between students and teachers lead to a greater engagement with music – the ideas and activities that attracted musicians to study in the first place. Music departments need to prioritise the

opportunities for deep reflection, exploration and production rather than the mere repetition or reproduction of ideas. Music departments, like music communities, should be fostering the conditions for the accrual of unexpected and informal knowledge and the free and unrushed exchange of experiences and ideas. To this end, Törnqvist (2004) found environments with these kinds of 'community' characteristics are far more likely to foster creativity.

Music communities were variously described by participants as places to play, have fun, engage in frivolity, and to explore. Music departments should strive to establish a sense of lightness, excitement and entertainment rather than offering only serious, predictable and inflexible conditions. Musician, composer and educator Carl Orff believed that students were likely to learn more effectively if they could do so through the process of play. Indeed, we describe the practical pursuit of music as 'playing music'.

Music departments could also reflect community settings in allowing, or even promoting, a lack of order and structure, in certain areas and instances that better accommodates the changes of hearts and minds often associated with the creative process. Messiness should be embraced as the playmate of creativity.

9.4.4. Discovering the student habitus

'Every single person who comes to study music at VU brings with them a lifetime of experiences, emotions and interactions with music that we don't know about.'

I made this statement to one of the participants whilst explaining why I was undertaking this research. Whilst this investigation found that music students tended to enter formal music study with a practical musical habitus, it is vital to remember that all musicians and music students, are individuals, with a host of personal, varied narratives. Music education needs to continue to create the conditions for the unearthing these stories.

Music departments need to invest in effective and substantial interviews/discussions between students and department prior to entry to allow for clearer ideas of student background, preferences, goals and needs. There

should be an honest consideration of whether the particular department and potential student are best suited. In the deregulated education market there are some concerning processes for entry into tertiary education. Institutions offer places to large swathes of students with little knowledge or understanding of their educational backgrounds and needs. Many students 'choose' educational pathways based on scant knowledge of the nature and specifics of the courses they are applying for. These processes may result, initially, in institutions filling places but may also result in high rates of attrition and, of concern, poor educational experiences and outcomes for students. Students in such circumstances lose time and money and may be put off tertiary education altogether. Thoughtful, honest and measured conversations between coordinators/teachers and potential students can lead to informed decision making about suitable study directions.

Music departments should prioritise opportunities for ongoing conversations between staff and students. Informal discussions between staff and students create effective processes for student ideas, feedback and suggestions to be enacted within teaching and learning in an authentic and effective way. It is important that such processes are not perceived as 'lip service' merely offering the façade of student enfranchisement. Providing space and place for meaningful discussions for members of tertiary music communities lead to greater levels of agency and engagement in students.

Music educators need to expect and accommodate different musicians from a range of backgrounds, with a plethora of diverse ideas, needs and goals. Different backgrounds should be celebrated, not tolerated or dismissed. The student with limited formal theoretical knowledge may possess unique compositional or arranging skills. Formal academic capital should not automatically be assessed as a 'deficit'. It is imperative that different music learning and teaching is tailored for different student cohorts with different habitus. Flexibility in music curriculum and teaching also needs to understand that students continually grow and change. Music departments need to accept that students will not necessarily need the same styles and education as they move, adapt and change throughout their educational and musical experiences.

9.4.5. Learning to value musical knowledge

If a balance is to be achieved between practical aspects of the music syllabus (the playing of music) and the theoretical capital required to be accrued (the knowing of music) how can musicians entering tertiary music study with limited musical capital be supported to learn while they play?

Almost all musicians enter tertiary music study with some areas of limited learning. Foundation courses can be created and tailored to address the needs of students, to assist them to acquire the skills necessary to successfully negotiate the extra learning that they will be required to achieve. Additional staff can play a vital role in assisting those students in cohorts who, whilst possessing talent and potential, need extra help with certain areas of learning. In general terms, extra time, caring teachers and flexible pedagogies can all be utilised to assist students with whatever additional support they might need from time to time. Such a paradigm would rest on the notion that learning and teaching are participatory processes, fuelled by engagement from all parties; as opposed to philosophies that posit that once a student enters the institution, it is up to them alone to work hard to meet the expected standards of the institution. It is also crucial that institutions be called to account for the widening gaps between the rhetoric of 'student support' and the realities of limited academic and administrative resourcing.

Music educators need to continually reflect upon how capital (as music knowledge) can be defined, constituted and valued. Music curricula based on traditional and confined understandings of legitimate music knowledge have been shown to be unsuitable to many passionate and vibrant musicians entering the tertiary music context. Music educators could explore alternative definitions of music capital based on the quality of learning and on practical and current skills and knowledge. Learning should also focus on what students identify they need, want and will use in the almost endless, and as yet unheard of, range of music scenarios following graduation. Educators can listen to and learn from students to actively create and re-invent what constitutes 'valuable' music knowledge. This can be a participatory and active process rather than the didactic traditional/historical process of asserting what (passive) students

should know. Teachers who are passionate about student learning and capable of flexible and tailored teaching are best placed to take up the challenge of engaging in and reflecting upon evaluations of music capital. Educators who care about students and who build strong and honest relationships with students can work to build what students really want and need to learn.

Knowledge of music should be based on real and engaged understanding, rather than reproduction and regurgitation. Emphasis should rest on the quality of learning. Pedagogies could focus on learning through doing and upon participatory learning that stresses activity rather than passivity. Music educators could explore notions of assessment, playing around with different ways in which knowledge can be evaluated. Music educators might experiment with extending the emphasis of assessment beyond measuring (for example, numeric) levels of music skill to observing and evaluating student well-being, engagement, creativity and other social and personal attributes.

9.4.6. Agency and autonomy

Balancing the dynamics of power in the tertiary music field is based on the development of an authentic and substantive educational paradigm. Music education should be predicated on equal participation in all aspects of music teaching and learning, and in the evaluation, decision making and changes to that teaching and learning process.

Participatory learning means that student and teacher learn together, as opposed to traditional didactic and authoritarian models that elevate the teacher above the student. Music departments can embrace democratic teaching and learning conditions where all stakeholders have the right to voice ideas equally. Such conditions allow for more direct involvement with all aspects of learning, from: choice and content of units; time, foci and teaching approaches in learning areas; and the processes, emphases and criteria of assessment. Indeed the benefits of participatory approaches in learning and teaching music have been explored and established by researchers, including Australian music educators (Burnard et al., 2008, Lebler, 2008, 2007, Daniel, 2007, Latukefu, 2009).

Participatory education needs to be extended beyond the classroom. Affording music students and teachers real participation in decisions about institutional

learning conditions, procedures and financial and administrative circumstances could result in the apprehension and maintenance of authentic enfranchisement. Involvement in institutional academic/administrative processes related to course structure, design and choice of study options has the potential to lead to engaged learning experiences for students and for music departments. Influential music researchers like Lucy Green (2007) and Stephanie Pitts (2012) have long advocated for the authentic inclusion of the student voice in music education.

It is important to distinguish authentic participation of students in their education with the attempts by universities to 'engage in consultation' as a way of creating the illusion of democratic involvement. There exists the opportunity for institutions to re-examine the notion of top down decision making and opt for the promotion of an active and lively student and staff voice within the institutional environment.

There exists a significant challenge for institutions to promote the active inclusion of students and teaching staff in the institutional decision making processes. The opportunity to create the substantive enfranchisement of music department constituents should not be ignored. Public education providers face the paradox of growing quality and performance criteria within ever constrained budgets. However, institutions (and the education sector and music 'industry') who are not prepared to effectively advocate for the needs and outcomes for all participants in these sectors, risk such disenfranchisement and disillusionment that the business of music education may ultimately become unviable.

Student agency involves the creation of opportunities and conditions for students to make decisions about their learning. Music students should be guided to think about effective ways to learn what they want and need. Given the opportunity, students have the capacity to decide the artistic and creative direction of their musical ideas and work. Students can choose the types of projects and processes that might be designed to achieve these means with appropriate support and mentoring. Autonomous learning frameworks should clearly accommodate student input in the design and implementation of the assessment of learning and creating. There is likewise an epistemological extension of self-direction and agency to teachers and departments who need

to have the freedom and ability to create and implement educational ideas, needs and goals based on idiosyncratic contexts.

The promotion of the principles of self-direction in music knowledge and evaluation is based on the premise that students and teachers are members of local and global communities who are expected to act autonomously and reflexively.

The notion of voice is paramount in the construction and maintenance of real and authentic agency. There are a range of considerations that can be taken into account in music education to ensure that the voice is heard clearly.

Establishing agency and enfranchisement in music learning and teaching involves a constant and ongoing conversation about the experiences of all participants in the conditions of learning. Qualitative research methodology, for example, could be employed as an ongoing, usual and functional part of reflexive education. Creating the time and space within class, course, department and institution for voices to be heard and acted upon allows for thorough consideration to promote engagement and improvement. Processes of inquiry prioritising authenticity and substance involve *listening* to educational participants. This can be differentiated from formulaic evaluative methods and quantitative data collection designed to satisfy sector and institutional requirements rather than aimed at benefiting students and other constituents.

Real and effective conversations within the educational context necessarily allow for different voices to be heard. Where all voices are heard no voice is inherently louder or more important than the other. Clearly, this is currently at odds with traditional hierarchical structures existent within educational environments where management is often the *only* voice heard. As noted by Richardson 1997, p. 2 in Harrison (2012):

‘We are restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us. Academics are given the ‘story line’ that the ‘I’ should be suppressed in their writing, that they should accept homogenization and adopt the all-knowing, all-powerful voice of the academy’.

Education interested in establishing an equal agency and involvement for all participants should be striving for all voices to be present. If some voices are

not being heard it is incumbent upon constituents to demand of institutions why they are not. Tertiary music departments, acting as democratic and celebratory communities of inquiry and action, can work to facilitate a strong and clear collective voice for advocacy and change.

Participant voices can be critical of aspects of the fields in which they are engaged. If encouraged, voices associated with historical disenfranchisement tend to voice opinions and ideas that test and challenge the very conditions that describe and create and their experiences. Those who have accrued and maintain greater levels of power may be less than enthusiastic to hear from those with limited agency. Listening to challenges to established conditions in learning environments may be uncomfortable and difficult to hear amongst all levels of authority. However, acknowledging challenges to often uncontested wisdom in teaching music allows a greater say for agents and the opportunity for vibrant and diverse conversations about learning music. Promoting and guiding all participants to advocate for ideas and changes on the basis of coherent, constructed rationale encompasses fundamental attributes of the effective and engaged global/social citizenship.

Students represent those agents traditionally afforded the least power within educational contexts. However, they can be supported to challenge entrenched conditions of institutional hierarchy and power. Educators can encourage questioning by students and be prepared to discuss questions and be up front when they do not have answers or admit they may have previously provided the wrong answers. Educators should continually and substantively observe student engagement, challenges and successes and ask why and how student experiences can be improved. Institutions and educators who welcome the opportunity to receive and consider critical feedback are engaging in effective and ongoing reflexive practice. Institutions face the challenge and opportunity of creating and facilitating the conditions where all participants ask probing questions of themselves and each other.

9.4.7. Well-being

In contrast to formalised (or legitimate) music knowledge as *cultural* capital, well-being can be characterised as a type of *personal* capital - a functional

capacity of mind and body. My research findings indicate that there is a need to balance form and function in music education conceptualised in the aim of balancing well-being with the accrual of formal music (cultural) capital. Ensuring the well-being of all members of the music learning journey requires the establishment and evaluation of the quality and quantity of conditions that lead to general well-being. All of the following five themes are associated with this personal capital in one way or another.

9.4.8. Belonging and inclusion in communities

Participants experienced enjoyment, engagement and belonging in music communities. It is clear that music education contexts should create teaching and learning conditions that mirror feelings of inclusion experienced in community settings. Music departments should work to create spaces and places where students feel comfortable and accepted, form friendships, collaborate and explore ideas. Students should have some spaces to use when and how they need. Students could be encouraged to help shape these spaces and places and to assist in directing a diverse range of projects and music activities. A sense of belonging can be fostered through a supportive and engaging environment where students feel welcomed and free to participate in the design and use of the spaces in which they are learning.

Incorporating community conditions in formal educational settings involves establishing informal, organic, slow, self-directed learning alongside formal and planned learning. A community is where people are drawn to and *want* to be, not somewhere they feel they *have* to be. There needs to be reconsideration of the traditional concomitants of formal academic structures (such as timetables, attendance requirements and other conditions). Communities of musical and creative practice and reflection could be established within and as part of the institutional setting. Music departments (or communities) would be able to operate within external creative arts communities, in ways similar to those explored and reported on by Australian researcher/educators like Sefton-Green (2006) and Schippers and Bartleet (2013).

Many participants in this study described their music communities as a 'home away from home'. Music departments able create domestic conditions (in the

sense of a *home*) truly accommodate the habitus. What better place for students in which to learn, create and thrive?

9.4.9. Resilience and Confidence

A focus on well-being necessarily recognises the importance of resilience, strength, self-belief and competence as essential skills within teaching and learning. Music departments need to facilitate students to develop the strength to direct their own musical and creative learning paths. Music education needs to assist participants to acquire the confidence to effectively engage with authority and ask questions. University and student charters promoting the right to question may not be enough. Educators need to help build perseverance and a legitimate expectation that all students can and should be heard. Students should believe that they can expect change as a result of well-founded argument and advocacy. Institutions could acknowledge and reward resilience and self-belief in the institutional context, rather than attempting to stifle these attributes.

As I've outlined previously the shifts in institutional cultures required to establish many of these recommendations are significant challenges for music education. However it is self-evident that educational environments that tolerate fear, anxiety and competitive 'win at all costs', 'survival of the fittest' environments risk failing the well-being of their constituents. For example, performance anxiety has long existed as a routine part of many music education contexts, but has been tolerated or ignored as an often unavoidable concomitant of music performance. Aspects of music education resulting in significant negative impacts to students need to be addressed.

Music education needs to foster confident and resilient teachers able to advocate effectively and intelligently for improving teaching and learning within the institutional contexts. All educators can contribute significantly to research requirements, possibilities, methods and processes, if they are invited to do so in a spirit of inclusion and open-mindedness. Similarly, institutions and the music education sector more generally need to consciously build the necessary resilience to advocate for the needs of their stakeholders. Educational

organisations need to actively challenge policy that does not seek to improve conditions for all constituents.

9.4.10. Flourishing

Well-being incorporates flourishing. Music learning environments should be nourishing students to be happy and to grow. Students who are engaged and curious are likely to develop strong and vibrant identities. Music education needs to reconceptualise student 'success' according to criteria related to notions of flourishing in addition to quantitative measures such as study scores and pass and retention rates. Healthy learning environments could involve de-emphasising pressure, competition, fear and punishment to promote collegiality and collectivism. Prioritising fun, play, exploration and experimentation is likely to result in positive and optimistic attitudes. Flourishing should be a major driver of curriculum development and the basis for evaluating effective teaching and learning.

All music education constituents have the right to flourish. There has long been an acceptance that education is a hard slog, rewarding sometimes in terms of social utilitarianism, but resulting all too often in over worked and stressed individuals. If educators are anxious and troubled and are not flourishing as individuals, then we should be asking why this is so. We need to work hard to identify ways to increase satisfaction, reduce stress and establish pleasure in the working life.

9.4.11. Acceptance and legitimacy

Institutional environments can foster acceptance of all constituents through reassessment of what constitutes 'legitimate creativity' in music education. Music education community members can offer virtually limitless ideas for curriculum content and approaches to assessment. Educational contexts should strive to break the Deluzian refrain (Gould, 2012) by moving purposefully away from traditional, legitimised and normalised tropes of music skills, knowledge and style. Disrupting orthodox music education doxa allows for 'sonorous potentialities of creative and active expression between students' by accepting and legitimising all voices (Gould, 2012, p. 76). Music education should be

revolutionary and iconoclastic. Those involved in music education need to continually question the overarching definitions of legitimate music skills and knowledge and the criteria used to value music and creativity.

The legitimating processes and paradigms of institutional education result in passive and silenced participants. Students need to actively and effectively reflect upon their own music abilities, needs and directions. This self-reflexivity is a vital part of the reconceptualization of traditional hierarchical structures where teachers are seen as the sole repositories of all legitimate knowledge and students are merely passive consumers and imitators of that knowledge. Students should be able to accommodate alternative evaluations of their musical selves, ideas, achievements and creations. Teachers should reflect honestly upon their skills and approaches rather than only relying on institutional and industry/career markers of legitimacy. Artists and educators should resist retrograde and uniform attempts to legitimise music skills, knowledge and creativity.

Building a learning community based on respect for diversity of musical ideas, activities, identities and goals engenders a spirit of acceptance and inclusion. Different backgrounds and preferences are explored and celebrated rather than merely tolerated or even excluded. Respect for all identities and ideas is integral to empathetic, collaborative and inclusive learning environments.

9.4.12. Identity

Music education should strive to promote well-rounded and self-sustaining individuals. Music education should be much more than passing on legitimate knowledge accrued through the successful reproduction of that knowledge. Effective learning and teaching in music begins with building an environment where students learn to think about who they are as musicians, students and members of local and global communities. Students may learn that these identities are always evolving and changing. In such circumstances they can continually reassess their foibles, challenges, skills, attributes and desires. Students should be supported to overcome challenges and to achieve goals.

Music educators need to allow the time, space and opportunity for students to become self-directed and self-reflexive. It is not the role of teachers or

institutions to label or delineate student identity and value. Encouraging reflexivity in all members of a music education community of practice engenders the development of mature, balanced and capable individuals, prepared to actively and successfully engage in music. Institutions should offer those moving from music communities to formal music education the opportunity to grow musical knowledge and personal well-being in order to lead active and engaged lives.

9.5. Coda and outro: Final remarks

This investigation celebrates the ability of voice and story to guide music education and music education research. The inquiry has provided time and space to listen to my voice and reflect upon my (his)stories as a musician, teacher and researcher. The recommendations for music education outlined are based on the careful and purposeful analysis of stories voiced by the participants in this research. Students shared personal histories in music. They provided valuable insights into music making in communities. The participants shed light on the challenges of negotiating the transition and journey through formal music education. Their voices sang of energy, passion and creativity in music. Participants learned different things, at different times. They learned to challenge dominant doxa and the institutional limitations of music teaching and learning and called for agency and enfranchisement in formal music education. This chorus of voice and story sang together in harmony for music knowing and doing. The voices will continue to sing. I will be listening.

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Appendix 1. Participant information

Table 1. Vocational Education (VE) participants (n = 9)

Name	Gender	Age	Secondary school	Religious community	VU course	First in family to attend University	VCE music	AMEB level
Alex	Male	20	Public	Yes	Advanced Diploma of Music	Yes	No	N/A
Harry	Male	23	Public	No	Advanced Diploma of Music	Yes	Solo units 3/4 Vox	N/A
Gordon	Male	20	Public	No	Advanced Diploma of Music	Yes	No	N/A
Farrah	Male	23	Public	No	Certificate IV Music	No	No	N/A
Emma	Female	19	Public	No	Certificate IV Music	No	Solo units 3/4 Vox	N/A
Caitlin	Female	20	Private	No	Advanced Diploma of Music	No	Group units 3/4 Vox	N/A
Djava	Female	20	Public	No	Advanced Diploma of Music	Yes	No	N/A
Bridie	Female	21	Public	No	Advanced Diploma of Music	Yes	Solo units 3/4 Flute	N/A
Isabelle	Female	22	Public	Yes	Certificate IV Music	Yes	No	N/A

Table 2. HE: Bachelor of Education P-12 (n= 8)

Name	Gender	Age	Secondary school	Religious community	VU course	First in family to attend University	VCE music	AMEB level
Alannah	Female	22	Public	Yes	3 rd year	No	VET music units 3/4 VOX	N/A
Belinda	Female	21	Public	No	2 nd year	Yes	Group units 1/2 VOX	N/A
Caroline	Female	25	Public	No	3 rd year	No	No	N/A
Delaney	Female	22	Public	No	3 rd year	No	VET music units 3/4 VOX	N/A
Elle	Female	26	Public	Yes	3 rd year	Yes	No	N/A
Fabian	Male	22	Private	No	3 rd year	No	No	N/A
Graham	Male	48	Public	Yes	3 rd year	Yes	No	N/A
Hung	Male	20	Public	Yes	2 nd year	Yes	No	N/A

Table 3. HE: Bachelor of Music Graduate Participants (n=11)

Name	Gender	Age	Secondary school	Religious community	Years	First in family to attend University	VCE music	AMEB level
Andrew	Male	25	Church	Yes	2005-2008	No	Solo unit 3/4 guitar	N/A
Ben	Male	35	Public	No	2006-2009	No	No	N/A
Cora	Female	31	Public	Yes	2005-2008	Yes	Group units 1/2 guitar	N/A
Dylan	Male	24	Public	Yes	2005-2008	Yes	VET units 1/2 guitar	N/A
Effie	Female	23	Church	No	2006-2009	No	VCE solo units 3/4 Violin	Grade 6 violin
Finn	Male	31	Church	Yes	2006-2009	No	No	N/A
George	Male	24	Church	Yes	2006-2009	Yes	VCE group units 3/4 guitar	Grade 2 guitar
Helena	Female	24	Church	Yes	2005-2008	No	VET units 3/4 VOX	N/A
Iggy	Male	25	Private	No	2005-2009	No	VCE group units 1/2 guitar	N/A
Jordan	Male	26	Public	No	2004-2007	Yes	No	N/A
Kyrie	Male	25	Public	No	2006-2009	No	VCE solo units 3/4 guitar	Grade 5 piano

Appendix 2. Music references

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