

UNIVERSITIES AND THE MUSIC-LEARNING CONTINUUM

Glen Carruthers

Brandon University, Canada

© Glen Carruthers, 2006. All rights reserved.¹

For many years, experts have regarded the integration of special populations into the general population ideal for all concerned. Society subscribes to a different belief – and universities respond to it – concerning intellectually or artistically gifted individuals. It has long been usual to remove them from the general population and accord them training that allows for little interaction with the population at large. This is nowhere more evident than in music education. This paper considers the extent to which universities, in catering to special populations and focusing on narrow definitions of teaching and research, fail to meet the needs of lifelong music learners. Several innovative remedial strategies are proposed.

Translating research into action is one of the greatest challenges to education, and the rift between research and practice is nowhere more evident than in adult education and lifelong learning. “Limited Utilization of Research Findings” concerned the Canadian delegation to The Mid-Term Review Of The Fifth International Conference On Adult Education (CONFINTEA V).

The lack of a focus on the utilization of research to improve the theory and practice of adult education is disturbing. What research is done

¹ A shorter version of this paper, entitled “Articulating diverse music-learner populations”, appears in D. Forrest (Ed.), *A Celebration of Voices: Proceedings of the Australian Society for Music Education XV National Conference* (Parkville, Victoria: Australian Society for Music Education), pp. 48-54.

within the university environment is seen as having little application to practice (Report, 2004).

The infrequency with which research leads to sustainable action is one of John Goodlad's leitmotifs. He is eloquent on the topic.

The degree to which educational reform movements sweep the country without changing anything is amazing. In quite short periods of time, a substantial body of conference papers and published reports emerges around non-events. This phenomenon is due in part to an academic reward structure that favors writing about something over doing it.

The result, too often, is that news of events is taken as synonymous with the events themselves. And so, written accounts become a history of what never was. Then, in a later era, good ideas written about in an earlier one pop up again and are quickly discarded because they did not "work" before (Goodlad & Soder, 1992, p. 10).

Goodlad also cautions that what appears to be action research, or is touted to be this, is often nothing more than a project unlikely to engender far-reaching change.

I'll give the final word on this state of affairs to Agatha Christie. In *Postern of Fate*, Tuppence complains:

Everyone's doing research nowadays . . . You know, all the teenagers and all one's nephews or cousins or other people's sons and daughters, they're all doing research. I don't know actually what they do research into nowadays, but they never seem to do it, whatever it is, afterwards. They just have the research and a good time doing the research and

they're very pleased with themselves and – well, I don't quite know what does come next (Christie, 1973, p. 63).

What must come next is the identification, isolation, and elimination of factors that impinge on the practical realization of research results.

In terms of adult education and lifelong learning, the chasm between research and practice can be traced to several sources, including divergent and sometimes conflicting objectives of learning service providers, boundaries in jurisdiction and authority, elitism, protectionism, and the longstanding segregation of learner populations based on age, aims, apparent ability and background.

These factors are inter-related. The objectives of learning service providers make for rigorous segmentation of adult learner populations. Some providers, for example, focus on practical skills and others do not. This ignores the parallels between inquiry-based education and research on the one hand and skills-based training and practice on the other. Ideally, education and training flow seamlessly into one another. Likewise research and practice. In fact, intersections arise all-too-infrequently and what occurs in one arena may or may not have bearing on what occurs in another. This is most evident when training and learning are viewed as different and even antithetical objectives.

In October 2004, during a short residency at Brandon University, pianist Marc-André Hamelin participated in a Question & Answer session with students. Not surprisingly, given the context, several questions concerned practise habits. When asked how he worked on technique, Hamelin responded without hesitation that he acquired his technique many years ago and was now concerned with maintaining it. His training, once he developed technical skills commensurate with his repertoire, had come to an end. For Hamelin, learning is ongoing (I don't think he would suggest he ever stopped learning

about music!) but training is not. Most of us, however, do not possess technical authority to a degree that precludes further training. For the majority, learning and training continue apace.

Sociocultural theorists, as Peter Renshaw explains, consider learning “a dual process involving transmission and reproduction as well as creativity and transformation” (Renshaw, 2003, p. 360). The same is true of musical performance, which combines re-creative and technical with creative dimensions. Seen in this light, action-based training and inquiry-based learning are more congruent than they first appear. Closer investigation of music in all its dimensions would reveal the same thing, that technique and creativity, like action and inquiry, go hand-in-hand.

The arbitrary distinction between training and educating is one impediment to the integration of music-learner populations. That training and educating are sometimes purviews of different institutions is only the most obvious manifestation of this dichotomy. Within a single institution, the ratio of one component to the other varies tremendously between programs. In universities, performance and recording technology involve more training than scholarship; in musicology the reverse is true. In the field of music education itself, there is often tension between training and educating future teachers. Training students to operate within a set of practical constraints and educating them to challenge and reject these same strictures necessitates dialogue between antipodes every step of the way.

In a series of occasional papers on school-university partnerships published by the Institute for the Study of Educational Policy (University of Washington) the difference between the aims of schools and universities arises again and again. While “the juxtaposition of the action-oriented culture of the school and the inquiry-oriented culture of the university offers promise of shaking loose the calcified programs of both” (Goodlad, 1986, rev. '87, p.

17) the reality is not so impressive. While there have been isolated successes in articulating schools with universities, there has been little systemic progress in this regard, and certainly not in music education in Canada.² If schools and universities pursue different aims, and other service providers operate independently, the system (or, more accurately, non-system) is too fractured to serve its clients effectively.

The seeds of an integrated learning continuum, extending beyond schools and universities, have recently been planted in Canada. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) is a federal agency conceived during the final days of the Chrétien government. Despite some scepticism whether it would survive a change in government or government leadership (Scofield, 2003), the CCL is now established. Its website (www.ccl-cca.ca) provides information on the background, scope and anticipated outcomes of this ambitious endeavour.

Created through an agreement with the federal government's department of Human Resources and Skills Development in 2003-2004, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) is a national, independent and non-profit corporation that is committed to improving learning across the country and across all walks of life (CCL Website, Who We Are).

The CCL avows three strategies:

- by informing Canadians on the progress of learning in Canada, we will help empower them to learn better;

² Literacy is an exception, where important strides have been made in school/university partnerships. The National Network for Education Renewal, which assumes "responsibility for improving conditions for learning in the entire school and university community," recently established its first centre in Canada. The application for NNER membership by Brandon University and the Brandon School Division was approved October 21, 2004. For information on the NNER see <http://depts.washington.edu/cedren/NNER.htm>.

- by promoting a Canada-wide learning culture with all of our partners, we will help drive real progress in lifelong learning;
- by promoting and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and information among those involved in delivering learning across the country, we will help remove silos and ensure that success stories are not only shared but repeated across the country (CCL Website, Who We Are).

There is much to be optimistic about. The OECD and other agencies argue that Canada lacks a national perspective on education. The CCL will fill this lacuna. Although not specifically charged to do so, the CCL is positioned to address many challenges set forth at CONFINTEA V. Finally, the CCL's mandate to develop a national lifelong learning strategy should confront head-on the question where universities fit in the new learning continuum.

At the national Summit on Innovation in Toronto in 2002 community leaders from labour, aboriginal, business, arts and other sectors shared insights about lifelong learning in Canada. Certain themes were recurrent, including the need for “links among the various parts of our learning systems – a national roadmap for a culture of learning from early childhood right through life” (CCL Website, Speaking Notes). While business leaders were concerned with prior learning assessment and continuous training for employees, and although the close connection between workplace learning and productivity was acknowledged, the summit was “not just about innovation and productivity; not just about learning to do. It was also about learning to be and learning to live together” (CCL Website, Speaking Notes). This corresponds to goals established by the Stockholm European Council in 2001. “Four broad objectives for the achievement of a sustainable knowledge based

society [were affirmed]. In order of priority: personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability/adaptability” (Report, 2004).³

At a news conference, the President and CEO of the CCL highlighted the necessity to secure co-operation from provincial/territorial partners. This was also raised by the Canadian delegation to The Mid-Term Review of CONTINTEA V. In Canada, provincial and territorial governments, not the federal government, have direct responsibility for schools, colleges and universities. Unless closer co-operation between federal and provincial/territorial governments is at hand, the integration of theory and practice will remain hypothetical. The fact that no educational institutions beyond schools, colleges and universities are included in the provincial/territorial mandate is also problematic. The formal Canadian learning continuum is far from lifelong – it begins too late, ends too early and is interrupted in the middle.

To these impediments must be added a third. While other potential partners may be wholeheartedly committed to barrier-free access to lifelong learning, universities are only partly on board. Degree programs have, for a number of good reasons, selective intake. Applicants may not be rejected because of physical or learning disabilities, or gender, race, religion or creed, but missing prerequisites, poor high school grades or low marks on entrance exams and diagnostic tests will bar the way to those deemed not likely to succeed. This places universities at odds with current mainstream philosophies of lifelong learning where everyone is encouraged to participate to the best of one’s ability.

Entrance to university music programs is especially selective. Incoming geography students are not expected to be geographers, nor are first-year

³ Curiously, on the Stockholm European Council website, employability/adaptability is listed first and personal fulfillment last. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lll/life/consultation_en.html.

botany students expected to be botanists, but entering music students are expected to be musicians. They must have received extensive musical training, especially (for whatever reason) in performance, and have achieved a high standard. Even at universities with open admission policies in other areas, admission to music is by audition only. Students are accepted or rejected on the basis of prior learning, which puts tremendous responsibility on pre-university private and public music programs.

Consider for a moment some of the major trends in education of the past several decades. In no particular order, these include networking, collaboration, partnership, outreach, community engagement, cross-culturalism, multiculturalism, interculturalism, diversity, pluralism, equality of access, equality of opportunity, equality of outcome, barrier-free access, universal access, democratization, globalization, learning communities, and informal, non-formal, open, distributed, lifelong, life-broad, recurrent, continuous, self-directed, and asynchronous learning.⁴

The common thread is inclusion. Material should be globally sourced and available to everyone. From Ghanaian villages to American inner cities, we learn from each other not despite, but because of our disparities.

There is a contradiction here. Learner typologies such as those listed above distinguish between populations. Selman and Dampier are among those who question this practice. “An insistence on orderliness, precision and tight typologies may just be a distinct liability in coming to a full appreciation of the nature of adult education” (Selman and Dampier, 1991, p. 1). I propose the situation is more insidious than this. In education, the more we divide, the less we conquer.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of adult education nomenclature see Selman & Dampier (1991), pp. 1-13. For a discussion of the definition and meaning of “Learning Communities” see Duke (2004), pp. 24-25 and, more importantly, Renshaw (2003), pp. 355-371.

Definitions can help us understand concepts. The more clearly we define what a soldier is, the more likely we are to understand the purpose and function of the military. Depending on context – a survey on hiring practices, for example – there may be good reasons to distinguish between female and male, gay and straight, or even tall and short soldiers. If typologies facilitate segregating populations and treating them differently, the consequence is at odds with the original intent. We have, in effect, discriminated, not distinguished between populations.

The matter of inclusion, concerning different peoples and/or different musics, is a complex one. In recent years, much has been written about teaching popular music in schools. For all the reasons the literature cites, the concept is a good one. In practice, there are significant challenges. Many students will have a much more comprehensive knowledge than their teachers of the constantly and quickly evolving world of popular music. Moreover, as informal learning practices infiltrate classrooms more and more, and many teachers rise happily to meet new challenges, others will find this paradigm difficult to reconcile with ingrained assumptions about who does the teaching and who does the learning in schools.

A change in the way learning occurs in schools will inevitably affect universities years later. But universities do not accept change easily. They are, in the new learning continuum, renegade anomalies and proudly so. As I discussed in another paper, North American universities have long been places where elite people study elite music. Since “concepts of a musical elite and an elite music are bound up with one another (Carruthers, 2005, p. 14),” to protect one is to protect the other, which is what universities have done for a very long time.

In response to the new learning continuum, which is lifelong, to the new access model, which is democratic, and to the new content model, which is global, universities can do one of three things:

- a) Nothing. The university becomes more and more inquiry-based and leaves action to others.
- b) Something. The university blends its efforts with individuals, businesses, agencies and institutions positioned elsewhere along the learning continuum.
- c) Everything. The university extends its reach backwards and forwards to serve all ages, and upwards and downwards to serve all backgrounds, interests, and abilities.

In the third instance, universities would welcome a wider and deeper pool of applicants. What was once university extension would become normative, since community service would be a systemic priority, not just a poor and distant cousin to teaching and research as it still is at some institutions. Anne Percival believes “By linking the university and the community, continuing education . . . creates essential opportunities for institutional adaptation, renewal and transformation” (Percival, 2001, p. 137). Repositioning of extension from the margin to the centre of the university, not alignment with business and industry, may well be the means by which universities assume new relevance in a knowledge-based economy.

To achieve this, universities must accommodate two overlapping learner populations, only one of which has been served well in the past. Broadly speaking, learners may be vocational or avocational, and most are both. A business owner, for example, participates in a management seminar (i.e. vocational learning) and also takes ‘cello lessons (i.e. avocational learning).

The traditional university spends much more time, effort and money serving its vocational clients than its avocational ones. By this means, the needs of vocational and avocational learners are met to some degree. While vocational learning occurs in classes and programs designed to serve vocational needs, avocational learning occurs in any number of contexts. An individual interested in art history as a career will take university credit courses. An individual interested in art history as a hobby may take university credit courses, but can also access non-credit courses, evening classes at the local art gallery and self-directed studies on the internet.

At universities, the blending of vocational with avocational learners is both possible and feasible and happens all the time. In this regard, universities have an advantage over other adult learning service providers. NUO's,⁵ however, have advantages over universities. Community-based providers reach a much wider demographic. A drop-in centre may offer classes for children, adults and seniors, at many different levels, with a variety of divergent backgrounds.

If universities have an advantage over NUO's and NUO's have an advantage over universities, why not combine the strengths of one with the other? What would universities lose, for example, by making intergenerational learning a priority? By becoming more inclusive, would they not come closer to an ideal, dominating educational philosophy in universities and educational practice outside them for at least two decades? The answer is, theoretically yes, and empirically we don't know because we haven't tried. Although there have been successful university-based ventures in intergenerational learning, fundamental, sustainable changes to the way universities teach and students learn have not yet occurred.

⁵ The acronym NGO, to denote non-government organizations, has been in use for many years. In like fashion, I am using NUO to denote non-university organizations.

Expanding services to avocational learners and emphasizing intergenerational learning are only two ways of increasing university outreach. There are many others.

Before changes can occur, three challenges must be addressed: the first concerns service providers, the second, finances, and the third, most importantly, attitude, since this determines how funds are spent.

- 1) Service Providers. Some universities are distancing themselves from community programming as “growth in the number of adult education providers and changes in the economics of universities have altered the role and, some would argue, lessened the impact of university continuing education” (Percival, 2001, p. 133). Extension programs in music are vulnerable since, in most communities, instruction is readily available outside universities.
- 2) Finances. Any expansion of the university’s mandate would require reallocated or increased funding. When money is scarce, expensive, non-core programs come under review. Music is again vulnerable. Canada will soon lose an undergraduate music program – Huntington University – because of prohibitively high costs per student. Non-degree programs are generally cut before degree programs, so for at least two reasons extension programs in music, unless offered on a cost-recovery basis, fare poorly in times of fiscal restraint.
- 3) Attitude. “The common perception [is] that continuing education’s contribution falls under the university’s service function, a set of duties that academics tend to regard as subordinate to the primary function of teaching and research” (Percival, 2001, p. 136). My own institution

abandoned extension programming entirely when funding was scarce in the 1970s.⁶

For better or worse, there is a link between teaching and undergraduate programming, research and graduate programming, and service and extension programming. If service is considered a lesser priority than teaching and research, then continuing education remains subordinate to undergraduate and graduate degree programs.⁷

By segregating non-degree from degree students, or preordaining the nature of contact between them, opportunity for worthwhile spontaneous interaction is squandered. If music students taking music history and science students taking music appreciation never meet, science students may be deprived of music students' valuable insights. The reverse may also be true, perhaps with more far-reaching consequences. It is assumed a third-year clarinet major and an electrician interested in music could have no ongoing musical relationship other than that of expert and novice. The music major could teach the electrician about music. This assumption belies the frequency with which teachers claim (I believe sincerely) that they learn a great deal – something new every day – from their students. If this is true, fostering exclusively hierarchical interactions disadvantages both parties.

The practice of identifying in order to segregate learner populations occurs throughout the university system. It separates degree from non-degree students, music majors from arts majors, performance majors from composition majors, piano majors from violin majors, collaborate pianists

⁶ Now, non-core courses are only offered on a cost-recovery basis and individual faculties retain non-core revenue. If a faculty can break even or turn a profit by offering non-core courses it is welcome to do so, but operating funds cannot be allocated to a function considered incidental to the institution's main mission. This policy is an incentive for faculties to become entrepreneurial, but favours introductory courses with broad appeal.

⁷ For more on the institutionalization of adult education see Percival (2001), p. 137. For more on resistance to university-based community programming see Carruthers (2005), p. 12. For a typology of adult education providers see Selman & Dampier (1991), p. 98.

from solo pianists, second-year collaborative pianists from third-year collaborative pianists and so on. Whether music or non-music majors, vocational or avocational learners, university or conservatory students, universities separate one from the other to the detriment of all. Why is homogeneity preferred to heterogeneity? Is it administrative efficacy (see Selman & Dampier, 1991, p. 2)? Is it pedagogical utility? Or is it simply easier to deal with one group at a time?

Until recently, most universities “taught” improvisation only to students in jazz studies. Now, many institutions offer improvisation to all music students and more and more are requiring it. But all is not copasetic.

At McGill University, Lori Freedman, a classically-trained clarinetist and devoted improviser for many years, first started her [improvisation] workshop in the Fall of 2003. Though initially open to both jazz and classical majors, she decided this year [2004] to have only the latter in her class; the “jazzers”, she found, had too narrowly defined preconceptions of what improvisation should be (Chénard, 2005, p. 40).

The net result of this decision is clear. It is – and this is important – the so-called experts that lose out by being separated from novices. The latter will learn a new skill and the former will not – their “narrowly defined preconceptions” remain unchallenged.

A second example is even more to the point. Empirical evidence suggests and literature confirms that children are born improvisers. Whether it is lack of inhibition, natural curiosity, the need to discover and assert an identity, or all these factors combined, children have an innate talent for “making things up” that is often suppressed in later years. Could classically trained musicians learn something about improvisation from children? Could jazz majors learn something about improvisation from children? Could adults with no musical

training learn something about improvisation from children? In each instance the answer is yes. Yet there are few institutional contexts in which these learner populations will even encounter one another, let alone collectively engage in improvisation. Universities, because they cater primarily to an adult elite and, for reasons of administrative efficacy, pedagogical utility, and ease, fail to explore fully intergenerational, interdisciplinary and intercultural learning opportunities.

Unless the university defines itself more inclusively, it will become less and less a welcoming community. Renshaw cautions that many communities thrive on exclusion. He cites three “models that eventually produce a homogenous community rather than a community inclusive of difference. . . .” Two of these, “the *filter* model of exclusion [and the] *funnel* model of marginalization” are reflected in university admission policies.

The filter model of community maintenance establishes strict entry criteria so that difference is excluded by selective practices linked to tests, interviews and initial exchange of information. . . . The funnel model allows for diversity of intake but, through silencing and marginalizing of difference, those who do not fit into the dominant philosophy and practices of the community are required to leave (Renshaw, 2003, p. 365).

The filter model applies to university programs that have selective intake. The funnel model applies to all university programs, whether an initial filter is in place or not. In the first instance not everyone is admitted and in the second, everyone who has the ability to pay is accepted, but not all students are allowed to continue.

Funnels and filters beget priority and privilege. If universities become inclusive learning environments, not based on priority and privilege, current

funnels and filters have no place. Institutional modus operandi would need retooling. The university's research function would remain unchanged, but its teaching and service functions would be transformed radically. Revisions to evaluation and assessment procedures, curricula, and just about everything else would follow.

We must not think this means lowering the bar. The integration of diverse learner populations depends, not on relaxed standards, but on realistic priorities that account for divergent aims, abilities and means evident in all democratic populations. Until such changes occur, universities remain perched on the periphery of the new learning continuum, on the outside looking in.

References

- Canadian Council on Learning. Website. Retrieved January 25, 2005 from <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/english.asp>.
- Carruthers, G. (2005). Community music and "the musical community": Beyond conventional synergies. *The International Journal of Community Music*, 3. Retrieved February 23, 2006 from <http://www.intljcm.com/>.
- Chénard, M. (2005). Teaching music on the spur of the moment. *The Music Scene*, 7 (Winter), 40.
- Christie, A. (1973). *Postern of fate*. Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd.
- Duke, C. (2004, October). Learning communities and the language of learning. *Adults Learning*, 16/2.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1986, rev. '87). *Linking schools and universities: Symbiotic partnerships*. Occasional Paper No. 1. Institute for the Study of Educational Policy, College of Education, University of Washington (Seattle, Washington).
- Goodlad, J. I., & Soder, R. (1992, January). *School-university partnerships: An appraisal of an idea*. Occasional Paper No. 15. Institute for the Study of Educational Policy, College of Education, University of Washington (Seattle, Washington).

Percival, A. (2001). University continuing education: Traditions and transitions. In Poonwassie, D. H. and Poonwassie, A. (Eds.), *Fundamentals of adult education: Issues and practices for lifelong learning*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.

Renshaw, P. D. (2003, December). Community and learning: Contradictions, dilemmas and prospects. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 24/3.

Report (2004, February). Canadian Delegation on The Mid-Term Review of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), September 6 - 11, 2003, Bangkok, Thailand. Retrieved March 24, 2005 from [http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/Confintea/Confintea%20V%20\(2003\)%20-%20Final%20Report.html](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/CASAE/Confintea/Confintea%20V%20(2003)%20-%20Final%20Report.html).

Scofield, H. (2003, December 9). Canadian council on learning to be established. *The Globe and Mail*.

Selman, G. & Dampier, P. (1991). *The foundations of adult education in Canada*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing.

Stockholm European Council. Website. Retrieved March 24, 2005 from http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lll/life/consultation_en.html.

Glen Carruthers is Professor and Dean of the School of Music, Brandon University, Canada. Email: carruthers@brandonu.ca