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Short Biography
Geoffrey Lowe is Senior Lecturer in Music Education in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. He teaches into both the undergraduate and postgraduate music education courses in addition to conducting various community ensembles in the most isolated capital city in the world. Dr Lowe's research interests include student motivation, secondary classroom pedagogy and instrumental music pedagogy. He has written a number of award winning secondary music resource books.

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Abstract

In this study, I set out to investigate why many students drop out from elective instrument programs, particularly in lower secondary school. I examined the values and beliefs a sample of students in their first year in secondary school attach to learning an instrument, and the impact of the instrument lesson upon these values and beliefs. Forty-eight Year 8 students (age 12 – 13) from the Perth metropolitan area participated in eight focus groups. The study found that while participants had strong cognitive and affective reasons for learning, their competence beliefs were fragile, due in part to the dislocation associated with the transition into secondary school. Students revealed a need for a high level of positive reinforcement from their instrument teachers. The findings indicate that competence beliefs can be just as important as values in determining the future enrolment decisions of students of this age. The study concludes that it is important for instrument teachers to understand the unique needs of students transitioning into secondary school, and develop targeted instructional practices accordingly. Addressing the specific needs of lower secondary students represents one effective step in the process of improving retention rates in elective instrumental programs.

Introduction.

Playing instruments is an integral part of any school music program. However, retaining students in elective music programs through to the senior years is an international problem. Walker (2003) states that only 5% of the total student cohort in North America enrol in elective music programs in senior school, while Bray (2000) reports only around 2% of students undertake A level music studies in the UK. In Western Australia, three out four students in the government system cease learning an instrument before their final year of secondary school, and at a federal level, retention has been highlighted as a priority area requiring urgent attention (DEST, 2005). Wigfield and Wagner (2005), Sloboda (2001), Bandura (1994) and Harter (1990) suggest that the biggest drop-out from any elective program, including music, occurs during and immediately following the first year of lower secondary school. Accordingly, this article focuses upon student motivation to continue learning an instrument beyond the first year of secondary school. Specifically, it reports upon a study conducted with 48 students (aged 12 – 13) in their first year of secondary school (Year 8) in Western Australia (WA), in which the links between student perceptions of the instrument lesson and their motivation to continue were explored through the lens of expectancy-value theory. By constructing an understanding of the values and beliefs these students attach to learning an instrument, and the impact of the instrument lesson upon these values and beliefs, the study aimed to identify instructional practices that cater for the needs of this specific group of students. As such, it represents a practical step in addressing the broader issue of retention in elective music programs.

In this article, I briefly address the issue of student motivation and retention before locating the study in the WA context, and summarise the literature on retention in the first year of secondary school. I then outline the theoretical framework of the study before considering findings on why Year 8 students learn an instrument, and their perceptions of the positive and negative aspects of the instrument lesson. The article concludes by discussing the implications of the findings for instrumental pedagogy.

The place of students in research into motivation and retention

Stahlberg and Frey (1988) state that students' motives for engaging in activities, such as playing an instrument, are less stable than those of adults, and are more susceptible to outside influence and change over time. Given that the instrument lesson is a central point of interaction in school-based instrument programs in Australia, I chose to examine student perceptions of its impact, and by implication, the role of the instrument teacher, as an influence upon student motivation to continue. Bandura (1994) states that the task of creating learning environments conducive to motivation rests heavily on the abilities and efficacy of teachers. In particular, the teacher and the learning environment have a significant impact upon the values students attach to activities (Eccles, 2005), activity-related competence beliefs (Wigfield and Wagner, 2005), and efficacy beliefs in the subject area (Bandura, 1994). In turn, the types of activities set by teachers are important in stimulating thinking and feelings, and not just developing learned behaviours (Weston, Burton & Kowalski, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000; Schiefele, 1996).

Past research into retention in music education has examined the effects of socio-economic status (Teo, 2005; Pogonowski, 1985), gender (O'Neill, 1996; Phillips, 1995), student perseverance and practice strategies (McPherson & McCormick, 2006; McPherson & Renwick, 2001), teacher effectiveness (Brand, 2004; Hallam, 2002, Sims, 1996) parental involvement (Creech & Hallam, 2009; Wigfield & Wagner, 2005) and school support (Hallam, 2002; Olsson, 1996). In general terms, Sloboda (2001) cites boredom, competing interests and a growing lack of desire to achieve as reasons associated with dropping out in secondary school. However, research has tended to examine specific factors and issues across year groups, and not focused upon the experiences of particular year groups in substantive settings.

In undertaking this study, I was mindful that low retention rates in lower secondary school music programs impact upon the breadth and quality of the programs as a whole, especially through the

numbers and balance in musical ensembles. More importantly, low retention impacts the wellbeing of the students themselves (DEST, 2005).

Based upon my previous research experiences in Australia and the United Kingdom (Lowe, 2001; 2008), I believe that students in lower secondary school have a good understanding of why they learn an instrument. I have found most music students at this stage of schooling able to engage in open and healthy dialogue in interview situations, and forthcoming in sharing their beliefs about music at school. These experiences lead me to concur with Fielding (2004) in that speaking *with* rather than *for* students can yield a grounded picture of issues relating to motivation and retention.

Accordingly, I considered it important to consider a qualitative methodology for this study and approach students directly as the source for my data. This information would then ultimately become the basis for developing, among other things, targeted pedagogical responses for teachers, appropriate for this year group.

Background – setting the scene

The instrument lesson

Instrumental music operates in a unique learning environment in secondary schools in WA: Orchestral instruments are taught by specialist peripatetic staff on a weekly basis. Lessons range from 20 – 30 minutes each, and students in the first year of secondary school generally learn in groups ranging from one to five. Students are withdrawn from regular classes on a rotating timetable basis to minimise the impact on other school subjects.

In the government system, up to 5,000 students each year are selected via a standardised music aptitude test and offered lessons at no cost, while a similar number of students in the Catholic and private sectors pay for their lessons (DEST, 2005). Wind and brass students commence in-school instruction in Year 6 in primary school, and string players start earlier. As Year 8 (age 12-13) is the first year of secondary school in WA, on-going students are into at least their third year of learning when they enter Year 8.

The first year of secondary school

The literature suggests that the first year of secondary school has the greatest impact upon students' motivation in general (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005). Harter (1990) cites dislocation as the primary reason

for declining motivation and participation rates. Dislocation can take the form of: 1) disrupted social networks, 2) more impersonal interactions with teachers, 3) less personal school bureaucracies and 4) ability streaming in some subjects. More specifically, Wigfield and Wagner (2005) state that students' increasingly negative attitudes at this age often result from inappropriate instructional practices. For example, students may not find topics or materials stimulating or relevant to their needs due to the nature of the topics and a growing interest in activities outside school. Students may also desire greater autonomy than is available in rigid school structures (Eccles & Midgeley, 1989). Bandura (1994) describes lock-step instructional practices, ability groupings and competitive teaching practices as impacting fragile and newly emerging self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, first year students may be disengaging from elective programs because of the impersonal and controlling nature of the secondary school learning environment, which runs contrary to their emerging emotional needs. In the music context in the UK, Sloboda (2001) identified similar problems, citing among other things, a lack of school support and teaching programs not necessarily geared to meeting students' psychological needs. I therefore considered it relevant to examine the extent to which these reasons might also be reflected in the responses of first year music instrument students.

Theoretical framework for the research

The study was guided by the following research question: "What is the impact of the instrumental lesson upon the motivation of Year 8 students to continue learning a musical instrument in Western Australia, from the student perspective"? The nature of the question implied a qualitative approach, with data based in natural, real-life situations. I utilised an existing, well established motivational theory, namely expectancy-value theory, as a conceptual framework, or 'regulatory ideal'. The aim of the research was not to prove or disprove the theory (Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield, 1994), but rather to use the well established constructs of expectancy-value theory as the basis for framing discussions with students. The constructs of the theory were then used to help make sense of the data – to help 'unpick' what students were saying. Expectancy-value theory has previously been employed in this manner by Cock and Watt (2004), Matusovich, Streveler, Loshbaugh, Miller and Olds (2008), Arevalo, Pitkanen, Tahvanainen and Enkenberg (2009) and Tsiplakides (2010).

Expectancy-value theory was chosen because the values components of the theory are reported to be accurate predictors of future enrolment decisions (Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield, 1994). The theory describes motivation in terms of the values students place on the activities they are

directed to engage in, and competence beliefs that result from undertaking the activities. Values include the importance to self of engagement, the intrinsic feelings of enjoyment derived from engagement in specific activities (situational interest) and the subject in general (individual interest), and extrinsic factors such as the perceived usefulness of engagement. Values are mediated by the personal and physical cost of engagement. According to the theory, when the perceived cost of engagement outweighs the values, students will discontinue.

Competence beliefs include both current ability beliefs derived from the activities undertaken, and expectancies for future success, informed by components such as the learning environment, past experience and teacher feedback. Teachers are at the forefront of the theory because they regulate activities and provide feedback (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005). According to the theory, feedback has a significant impact upon competence beliefs and expectancies for future success.

Data collection
Focus groups were selected as the method of data collection. I considered focus groups to be the most appropriate method for gaining both the depth and richness of data I required, and a cross-section of opinions (Blor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001). Focus groups are also considered to be less intimidating for Year 8 students than individual interviews, and offer potential for a thorough range of responses (Morgan, 1998). However, I was aware of the practical limitations of the proposed research in terms of time constraints, the geographical size of WA (over 2,500,000 square kilometres) and the issue of saturation when too much information does not yield new information, but rather saturates and bogs the researcher down (Morgan, 1998). Therefore, I considered a sample of eight secondary schools sufficiently rigorous for this study (Patton, 2002).

The study involved 48 Year 8 students aged 12 – 13, drawn from three private and five government schools across the Perth metropolitan area. Schools were selected by school district, via a random stratified process to provide a degree of representativeness. Ethics clearance was obtained from the Education Department of WA, and each individual school, while each participating student and their parents signed a research consent form.

One focus group per school was convened, making eight in total. Mixed purposeful sampling was undertaken in conjunction with the music teachers in each school to ensure that focus groups 1)

included students across a range of musical instruments and with varying levels of ability, 2) were socially compatible, and 3) were talkers, not intimidated by an adult (Patton, 2002). While acknowledging the skewing of the sample toward more outgoing students as a limitation, I considered it important to meet with students who were prepared to talk, as it would be impossible in this setting to gather meaningful data from those who were unwilling or too shy to express their views and opinions. Interestingly, while it was not a specific criterion of the purposive sampling strategy, the groups turned out to be relatively heterogeneous in terms of the range of students' levels of motivation - from those who indicated high motivation towards playing an instrument to those on the verge of discontinuing.

To maximise student comfort, the focus group interviews were conducted at their schools between October – November, 2009 and lasted approximately one hour each. Focus group questions were semi-structured to allow plenty of room for student directed discussion. Each group was asked ten basic questions, framed within Expectancy-value theory as a conceptual organiser, and included three ice-breaker questions. I undertook a facilitator's role, keeping discussion focussed, and the resulting discussion was wide ranging. Students appeared comfortable within the focus groups, and uninhibited in discussions.

Data analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded. Data was transcribed and coded against the questions. From there, data was manipulated according to emerging themes, then grouped into three researcher derived categories relating to: 1) why students played a musical instrument, and 2) the positive and 3) negative aspects of the lesson. Responses were finally compared against the expectancy-value framework. NVivo 8 qualitative software was used to assist in data management and manipulation, and for the purposes of this paper, I have included many representative student responses, presented under pseudonyms, to give the reader an indication of the breadth and typicality of student responses.

Findings – what students said

Motivation for playing an instrument

From the three ice-breaker questions, 18 different reasons for playing were coded. Motives were not discrete but often interlinked, and did not involve discussion of the impact of lessons at this stage. Individual students described a variety of extrinsic reasons for learning, including the enjoyment of

undertaking music exams, and the ability to get out of other classes, but the majority of responses revolved around intrinsic reasons. A representative response described playing for relaxation:

> I like playing an instrument mostly because it's something to do that takes your mind off other things. (Trish, school B)

Several students described playing to de-stress:

> I just think if I'm a bit angry about something or a bit sad, I find if I bring out my euphonium and play it, it'll actually calm me down and make me feel better. (Bruce, School E)

Eric (School G) described both the challenge of succeeding, and playing as a form of self-expression:

> it's the way of expressing myself and I want to be good at my instrument and so it makes me feel better when I can practice and I can get over a piece and actually play it well…

Warren (School D) described motivation for playing in terms of the expressive sound quality:

> I really love the sound of the saxophone and really playing music and the expression it can give you and stuff.

Playing an instrument was also described as having its uses:

> I guess just looking down the long track and going a bit far, music can open a lot of doors for you, like a lot of jobs, and yeah, it can relieve stress and everything like that. And I guess it's just useful, I know in family reunions you can just pop out the flute and start playing. (Julie, School D).

Over two-thirds of coded student responses across all focus groups indicated that playing an instrument was fun. Students sometimes struggled to articulate why this was the case, but spoke in general terms:

> I don't want to become a musician but I want to keep playing my instruments for ages. I don't want to stop. I don't want to become a musician. I just like playing 'cos I like playing. (Emma, School B)

That motives for playing were interlinked and influenced by outside sources were again demonstrated by Julie (School D):

> Apparently, well, first when I started learning music, my mum told me that no one in my family does music. My parents hated me playing music but as I started getting better and started playing more fluently and much nicely instead of just screeching, my parents started enjoying it and then I started enjoying it, and I found that playing my flute actually relieves the stress I have. If I have an exam or something coming up, then I just relax, play a bit on my flute, listen to music and then I find that my brain functions better.

Overall, it was clear that students for the most part enjoyed playing their instruments. In terms of expectancy-value theory, Eccles (2005) would describe most students as demonstrating strong 'individual interest', as fun was described in stable, global terms, as opposed to 'situational interest', whereby fun is described in relation to specific activities.

From the focus groups, I noted a cognitive rationale for why students played instruments. In terms of values, while the 'fun' affective element was strong, importance value was also clearly present. Playing an instrument appeared important to students' sense of self, either through a desire for challenge and mastery, (described by Elliott & Dweck, 2005 under the umbrella of goal orientation), or in terms of relevance which Eccles (2005) describes as outward self-expression, or confirmation of inner aspects of self. As described by Ford (1992), playing an instrument was fulfilling 'within person' affective needs such as happiness and possibly curiosity through engagement with the psychobiological aspects of sound.

The positive aspects of the instrument lesson
At this point, I re-examined the transcripts and coded positive and negative references to lessons directly from the transcripts. Although the focus group questions were targeted at the instrumental lesson, invariably students discussed the role of their instrument teachers in generating the lesson dynamic and setting the tasks. Based upon the frequency of responses, I grouped the positive aspects of lessons into five emergent themes. Again, these were not discrete entities, but were heavily intertwined. The five themes were:

- an intimate, comfortable and non-threatening learning environment that is different from other subjects

- teacher attitude associated with rapport and respect

- professional teacher attributes including organisation, enthusiasm, encouragement and patience

- professional musician attributes including the ability to model the instrument to a high standard, and

- activity selection, relating to repertoire choice and ensemble playing.

Twenty-five students described the lesson dynamic as being different to other classes; they described the intimacy of the setting and the opportunity to 'relate' to their instrument teacher.

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I really like going to lessons, cos, like, it's good if you have a bond with the teacher and you feel pretty special…(Aaron, School G)

The intimacy of the group learning environment was also described in socially favourable terms.

Sometimes it's good because your friends are also in your lessons so it's fun to do things with your friends as well as doing the actual music part. (Mark, School C)

A recurring theme across all groups was students' need to feel competent. Students did not like being singled out in group lessons. Bandura (1994) notes that students at this age are sensitive to their relative standing among peers in activities that determine prestige. This was illustrated by Anne:

It kind of gives you more....if you get nervous about playing by yourself, it gives you more...it makes it easier because you've got someone else playing with you. You're not embarrassed if you play the wrong note because everyone else is always like playing the right one… (Anne, School D)

Nearly three-quarters of all students across focus groups stated that having a rapport with their teacher was important.

[My teacher is] always happy and it's easy to relate to what she's talking about as well. She seems to really like us and it makes me want to try harder….(Emma, School B)

One way this was demonstrated was through the introductory chat at the start of the lesson:

Before we start, it's not like there's a wall between us; we sort of get along together so like we have a little chat at the beginning so it's not like we don't know each other sort of thing. (Mark, School C)

Some students described the entry into secondary school as signifying a transition to adulthood, and enjoyed it when instrument teachers treated them with increased respect.

..when you're younger, people don't take you as seriously but if you say, 'well, with this piece, I feel I'm not going to be able to play unless I learn this' then they're going to say, 'well, first you've got to learn that so you can do this part' and not really take you seriously. But when you're older, they'll take your thoughts and input more seriously, so if you're not getting a part, you say, and you think you've got to learn this part to get that part right, they'll actually listen to you and try and help you learn that part before going on. (Julie, School D)

Over half the students in the study indicated the importance of a supportive and comfortable learning environment in which they felt respected. Students largely described this as being the responsibility of the teacher. Focus groups also had expectations that their instrument teacher should act like a professional teacher. The teacher's enthusiasm was a positive quality noted by students across all focus groups.

I really...my teacher really wants us to learn, she really wants to teach us because she's really enthusiastic and she, um...a good teacher would be saying, 'You know what, why don't you come back and I'll teach you this part' or 'Do you have time to practice this part with me on the weekend, you can...' things like that, you know, they really want… (Glenda , School E)

The importance of encouragement was another constantly recurring theme, with many students confirming a strong link between self-efficacy and encouragement, as typified by Trevor (School A).

My teacher repeatedly gives me good comments and says, 'Well done' and 'Good job' and that's like, it gives you a better self esteem, and you practice more and you get better, and then you start liking the music too. Whereas if your teacher says, 'No, you're doing that wrong, no you're stuffing it up' then you start disliking the music and then you don't like your teacher and then that makes you want to quit because you don't like the music because it's all too hard and you don't like the teacher because she keeps pointing out your mistakes and then it starts getting all difficult.

Another admired teacher attribute was patience. Eric (School G) described the need for thinking time to allow concepts to sink in and settle. For him, it was important that teachers acknowledged this and allowed for it.

I really like my teacher because she's really nice and she's willing to teach us new things. If we haven't got things right she'll go over it with us, she's very patient, so that's really important.

Ten students noted that patience and encouragement were manifest in the language and tone of instrument teachers in correcting mistakes.

When they correct you, that they do it in a nice tone, I guess, it's not like, 'Oh! You got that wrong!' It's like, 'Oh, can you just fix that up'. Because your teacher's going to have to point you out if you do something wrong because you need to learn it, but it's more the tone they use. (Bruce, School E)

Whereas many of the attributes students described are recommended professional attributes for all teachers, some of the attributes they described were specific to the intimate instrument learning environment. A strong emergent theme was that students viewed instrument teachers as professional musicians. In particular, students drew inspiration from hearing their teachers demonstrate on their instruments.

I like to go to lessons because my teacher is really nice and he's an inspiration to us all. My saxophone teacher, he plays the instrument like really, really well so he always plays to me, like how he plays, like really, really good pieces so that I can know how I will sound maybe one day if I keep practising and stuff – it's sort of like inspiring. (Ian, School G)

Students had more respect for instrument teachers who could demonstrate on their instrument – this has implications for multi-instrument teachers.

> This may sound really stupid but if they actually played the same instrument as they're teaching. Because there was one stage in Year 6 where [there was] a group of about four flutes and our teacher was actually the same teacher as the clarinet teacher and didn't really know how to play the flute at all. (Eliza, School D)

As well as drawing inspiration from their teachers' playing, students described modelling as an important pedagogical aid.

> My teacher doesn't really do much demonstrating and it would probably be a bit better if they did more. But if I do something wrong, they kind of correct it. And if I do something wrong, like really wrong, they'll actually show me how to do it properly. (Aaron, School G)

In summary, students described the value of teacher instrument modelling as 1) helping them understand how the instrument should sound, 2) helping them understanding how pieces should be played, 3) hearing the practical application of verbal instructions, 4) hearing the stylistic requirements of the music and 5) valuable for time management. Students stated that it was quicker and easier to comprehend new musical concepts when they heard them in practice.

> I like playing with my teacher, like she'll play half the part and I'll play the rest 'cos I like playing with her because she sounds really good and then I'm trying to match what she sounds like so I find better. (Alex, School B)

When exploring the types of activities undertaken in lessons, all focus groups invariably discussed repertoire. Repertoire was described positively when applied in three ways, namely: 1) a regular turnover of repertoire – students enjoyed a constant supply of new music to maintaining their interest, 2) repertoire choice – students enjoyed having a degree of choice in repertoire selection, and 3) repertoire familiarity – students expressed enjoyment playing music with particular characteristics, not necessarily contemporary 'rock' type repertoire, but music with generic characteristics that appealed to this age group. Due to time constraints, discussion in this area was not exhaustive, but students did indicate a desire for faster, more rhythmic, 'catchy' music. Film music emerged as an appealing genre. Beliefs about repertoire were summed up by Annette (School C) as follows, "More exciting [faster, rhythmic] pieces, they're like slow pieces and they're kind of boring".

Ensemble playing emerged as a popular lesson activity. Students enjoyed undertaking ensemble work with their teacher within their group lessons, and focus groups uniformly indicated that they wanted to do this more often. Playing in ensembles was described as fun and non-threatening.

> It's also a lot of fun because when you are doing stuff in a group, you can like do trios and duets and things, and then you're not just doing singular. If you make a mistake, then there's also other people who can cover it up from the teacher which also helps. (Trish, School B)

The negative aspects of the instrumental lesson

External to the instrument lesson, eight students described difficulties involved in the transition into secondary school including 1) increased amounts of homework, 2) lack of sympathy from non instrument teachers when they had to leave classes to attend lessons, 3) difficulties with coping with rotating timetables, and 4) general musical overload as they were expected to participate in instrument lessons, class music and school-based ensembles. These are all issues worthy of further study. In relation to the instrument lesson, I grouped responses under four emergent headings. Again, these were not discrete categories, but were interlinked, and parallels with the positive aspects of lessons could be seen. The four negative aspects were:

- dislike of technical work, particularly the need to practice scales
- differing levels of ability which lead to embarrassment and feelings of incompetence
- repetition, including a lack of repertoire turnover, and
- lack of rapport with the teacher, manifested in a lack of attention and lack of encouragement.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, virtually all students did not enjoy being made to play scales. In most instances, they described a failure to understand the point of them, especially when they were part of the regular lesson routine: " Doing scales every week, 'cos you have to keep doing it over and over again". (Mark, School G)

Mark's response implied the need for teachers to explain the purpose of learning scales, and the value of relating technical work in general to pieces being studied. Students also disliked an undue emphasis on aural activities such as sight reading and sight singing in their lessons. These were skills that they described as difficult to grasp, more so when they didn't understand their purpose.

The majority of students in this study participated in group lessons. All students in group lessons described an awareness of differing levels of ability with their groups. These were illustrated by Annette (School C) as:

> Sometimes you'll be in a group lesson and then the people with you aren't as good as you are because they haven't been playing as long. And so you have to go back to the beginning of it and go through it all again.

Different levels of playing ability lead to unconscious comparisons of ability.

> When there's one or two people who are really good at a piece and you're not as good at it and they won't stop annoying you because you can't play as good as them. (Maria, School D)

The negative impact of a comparative environment where students were aware of differences indicated the need for careful teacher management. That student self-efficacy was fragile at this age was evident in comments describing the embarrassment of appearing less competent in front of the peer group.

> Because sometimes if you stuff it, you get all embarrassed and there's people that will laugh at you or something, if you do. (Paul, School E)

One student noted that self-efficacy and competence related to not just playing but had implications for the delivery of instructions.

> Yes, yes, because sometimes people, they're like, 'yeah, right, we've got it' and stuff, and other people are behind. Then they'll be too scared to say anything and then Miss will just presume that you've got it and just go ahead. (Elizabeth, School G)

Comments overall suggested the fragility of student self-efficacy and self-esteem at this age, and of its susceptibility to outside influence.

Repetition, manifest through a lack of variety in teaching strategies, was described negatively by students. They expressed a desire for variety, especially in relation to the start of lessons, as described by Warren (School D).

> Doing the same things at the start of a lesson every lesson. You have to do the same thing all the time, even if you've got it exactly right, you have to keep on doing it, but it's boring and annoying.

Repetition, manifest through a lack of repertoire turnover, was also described negatively by students. This became a recurring issue across all focus groups.

Just the repetitiveness of having to play the same boring songs and then trying the hard ones which sound better but take a long time to get them. If you did like different things every lesson, just like to make it more interesting. (Eric, School G)

Repetition appeared less threatening to efficacy and competence, but impacted more on the intrinsic valuing of playing. In particular, it impacted upon students' situational interest.

The theme of lack of rapport manifested itself in the teacher having a dull voice, and a general lack of enthusiasm. It also included favouritism. One student described a natural teacher gravitation towards the best students in the group.

Like if the teacher didn't really like you and you were stuck on a piece and you were like, 'How do you do this' and like, and then they don't really care and they're just ignoring you and trying to get to their favorite ones of the group. So you wouldn't be able to like learn the piece and they'll be like, 'Why didn't you learn the piece' and it's like, 'I'm asking you...'(Zac, School C)

Because students had previously described instrument lessons as an intimate learning environment where they received personal attention, they were conscious when there was a lack of attention. This was largely described as a pedagogical issue – teachers not knowing how to work a group. In some instances, teachers divided their time so that each student received only five minutes of individual attention. Lack of encouragement was linked with rapport, and was also described in terms of its impact upon musical self-efficacy and perceptions of competence.

One of my teachers told me, well, she's not my teacher anymore but she told me that I would never be good enough to do TEE in music which I thought was pretty harsh, so I kind of don't really like her anymore, and I was seriously looking at my cello going, 'am I really that bad?' Oh really. But you know what, my teacher said, like my other teacher I went back to, said I was fine so I've just kept playing. But I don't really like the other teacher a lot. (Julie, School D)

When the focus group discussions addressed why students quit in their first year in secondary school (Eccles 'cost' construct), eleven students cited dislike of the teacher.

In my first year in Year 6, the first year I was playing, we had a really bad teacher and he always just set lots of homework and he wouldn't do very much at all. He didn't bring his trumpet in so he didn't play it at all, he'd just tell us what to do. And there was about...there was five people offered the position of the trumpet. Everyone took it up and then by the end of the year there was only two left. Lots of people had just quit and dropped out and I was actually thinking about it until I asked in the office and they said we were getting a different teacher for next year. So that's the only reason I stayed. (Andrew, School B)

Andrew's comment reflected a majority of students' responses regarding the importance of the teacher in creating a learning environment appropriate for student needs. For Andrew, dislike of his teacher and their teaching practices had played a large role in his near decision to discontinue.

Twenty-six students cited 'boredom' as the other main reason for students dropping out. Like StGeorge (2006), I found boredom to be a convenient label. In this study, 'boredom' reflected students' self-assessments of competence, and their need to protect self-efficacy and self-esteem. Students who perceived they were falling behind or less musically able, dropped out because of the fear of being embarrassed in front of others in group lessons and the fear of having to confront or concede failure. Students from all focus groups were quick to point out that a sense of failure was often self imposed, as 'failing' students no longer practised and therefore 'lost interest'. Avoidance behaviours associated with lack of effort were used as an excuse to protect self-efficacy and self-esteem. The need for the instrument teacher to identify these behaviours was implicated.

> One of my friends, she gave up because she couldn't get one of the things that she had to do. And she didn't speak up or anything (Elizabeth, school G).

Discussion

The expectancy-value lens

When viewed through the expectancy-value lens, focus group members uniformly described a strong individual interest in playing an instrument. Most students enjoyed playing and had strong motives for wanting to play external to the influence of the lesson. However, the lesson appeared to impact situational interest through the repertoire teachers chose and the attendant teaching pedagogies. Ensemble work, lively music and a regular turnover of repertoire stimulated situational interest whereas scales, slow music and repetition of repertoire turnover flattened situational interest.

Importance value was also apparent. Although not exhaustively examined, I noted that learning an instrument activated 'within person' goals such as happiness, challenge and relevance. Intrinsic and importance factors were the most common of the values constructs identified in this study, and the emergence of extrinsic factors relating to life-long learning by a minority of students suggested that some saw learning as not just a school-related activity. Responses indicated that the overall values students attached to playing an instrument were relatively strong, and were based around cognitive and affective notions of self. With the exception of situational interest, values did not appear on the surface to be heavily influenced by the instrument lesson. According to Eccles (2005) previous findings, strong

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values identified in this study should be indicative of high retention rates as students elect to continue involvement.

Importantly, however, this study also confirmed Stahlberg and Frey's (1988) assertion that the competence and expectancy beliefs of this age group are less stable and can be heavily influenced by the instrument lesson and the teacher. Students spoke consistently of the need to feel competent, the reassurance gained from teacher encouragement and the deflating impact of lack of encouragement. Students reported that a lack of positive reinforcement from their instrument teachers undermined their competence beliefs and thus their expectancies for future success. In short, students who don't feel confident about their current playing abilities start to doubt their ability to improve.

This finding was important, because Wigfield (1994) states that competence and values are positively correlated. He reports that the strongest correlation in early adolescence is between competence and importance value. By implication, low competence beliefs can undermine the importance to self of engaging in an activity when they generate feelings of failure. A finding by Sloboda (2001) that music students of this age may no longer necessarily value success may partly stem from declining competence beliefs. In this study, despite a high intrinsic value associated with playing, students considered playing an instrument as less important when their competence beliefs undermined their emerging sense of identity. When notions of competence undermine importance values, students may drop out to protect self-efficacy.

In the group lesson context, the fragility of competence beliefs expressed itself through a fear of failure and embarrassment in front of other group members. This was reflected in the need to protect both musical self-efficacy and general self-esteem. Students were well aware of differing ability levels within groups, and were very quick to point out teaching pedagogies that reduced the potential for harsh comparative assessments. Bandura (1994) and Harter (1990) suggest that secondary school structures increase student awareness of differences in ability through ability streaming. In this study, when musical self-efficacy was threatened, students almost uniformly reported a desire to drop out under the guise of boredom. Similarly, when comparative assessment situations threatened group social standing, students indicated a desire to drop out to protect prestige. In this study, protection of competence and self-esteem in the group setting appeared to be powerful enough to outweigh the importance and interest attached to learning an instrument.

As described in the literature, the impact of dislocation, changed teaching practices and the general emotional challenges of adolescence may be contributing to apparently fragile self-esteem and competence beliefs reported by the students in this study. Student desire for a comfortable learning environment may be a reaction against the impersonal nature of secondary school, whereas the need for rapport may be reflective of a desire for a personal relationship with a teacher. Students recognize the potential for a personal relationship and attendant security in the intimacy of the instrument lesson with its small class size. The desire to maintain social standing in the group lesson may be reflective of the need to rebuild social networks disrupted in the move into secondary school, manifest when students are placed in new groups with others often unknown to them. The need to feel competent may reflect the need to affirm emerging notions of the musical self – that they are good at what they like. The desire for certain types of music, regular turnover of pieces, and a dislike of scales would appear to reflect the assertion made by Wigfield and Wagner (2005), Sloboda (2001) and Bandura (1994) regarding student perceptions of ill-fitting instructional practices for this year group.

Implications for instrumental pedagogy

Unlike traditional, classroom-based subjects, the instrumental lesson provides a unique environment for music teachers to counteract many of the problems associated with the transition into secondary school. Students in this study indicated a high individual interest in playing. They enjoyed playing, they enjoyed playing with their teachers, and they enjoyed hearing their teachers play. They viewed their instrument teacher as a professional musician and drew inspiration from hearing them play. These findings suggest that teaching strategies such as instrument modeling and engagement in ensemble playing have high motivational and educational benefits in building intrinsic value. Because of the small numbers involved in group lessons, instrument teachers should consciously seek to develop rapport with individual students through simple 'meet and greet' strategies, unavailable to teachers with large class numbers in other subject areas. But when there is no rapport, the lesson assumes the status of just another impersonal activity in an increasingly impersonal school environment.

Instrument teachers can contribute to affirming competence beliefs through the greater use of small group ensembles that cater for players of differing abilities, thus safeguarding fragile efficacy and self-esteem in the group setting. The judicious use of encouragement helps build feelings of competence, especially when aligned with other professional teacher attributes, such as patience and enthusiasm. By recognising students' needs, Eccles (2005) states that a 'good fit' between the learning environment and the needs of the individual can be achieved. For students in their first year of secondary school, a 'good

fit' between the instrument teacher and the needs of the student includes the maintenance and building up of competence beliefs.

Conclusion

According to the students involved in this study, the instrumental lesson does play an important role in helping determine their motivation to continue beyond the first year of secondary school. Rather predictably, I affirmed previous findings that the instrument lesson impacts the values and competence beliefs of Year 8 students. However, whereas values have previously been cited as being the most reliable determinant of future enrolment decisions in other subjects, the key finding of this study is that competence beliefs appear just as influential in future enrolment decisions in the instrumental music setting for this age group. Fragile competence beliefs manifest through a fear of failure affect cognitive and affective notions of the importance of music to self. In addition, the lesson can influence fragile self-esteem through comparative assessment situations within the group lesson setting. Both these findings require further, more detailed study, as they represent a significant departure from established expectancy-value findings.

Issues associated with dislocation at the transition to secondary school reported in generic studies also emerged in this study, particularly in relation to the impersonal nature of secondary schools. However, the intimacy of the instrumental lesson places instrumental teachers in a unique position. By consciously attempting to generate a comfortable and non-threatening learning environment, taking an interest in their students, encouraging students' efforts, utilizing their skills as professional musicians to inspire students, and selecting appropriate repertoire, instrument teachers can able to counter some of the unsettling effects of dislocation. Instrumental teachers must be aware of the uniqueness of the instrument learning environment and exploit its potential. Addressing the needs and concerns of first year secondary students is one effective step in the process of improving retention rates, for the benefit of music programs and the students themselves.

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