

Understanding what we mean by portfolio training in music

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Although musicians have always had portfolio careers, the discourse in conservatoires around training musicians specifically for portfolio careers is relatively new. This is partly because of increasing opportunities in the workplace for entrepreneurial and multi-faceted musicians and partly – in the UK at least – because of educational policy and practice. This article incorporates narratives provided by professional portfolio musicians and students and teachers at a single conservatoire in the UK, to illustrate disjunctures between the expectations fostered by conservatoires undergoing changes in their culture and the lived experiences of teachers and students responding, in real time, to changes both within the conservatoire and in the wider society. One of the key findings of the research is that teachers and students have qualitatively different conceptions of what it means for students to be trained for portfolio careers. The paper concludes by considering the implications of their different understandings for initiatives to reform conservatoire curricula.

Introduction

I think it's weird because we are being pulled in two different directions. Because the college here and the academics realize the importance of the portfolio career and that's the way the college is going. We need more of all these different things. We need more pedagogy, we need more mindfulness, we need more this and more that. Whereas students are seeing this ever-increasing competitive environment that they are going to be going into after college and they're saying shit I need to be doing more performance, more of this, more of that. I need to perform at the Wigmore Hall before I'm 24, I need to do this or whatever. So it's kind of going in opposite ways and I don't really know how to bring things together again (Cassandra, fourth-year undergraduate cellist, 2015)¹.

Conservatoires around the world are reacting to a rapidly changing society in which many traditional career pathways are no longer open to musicians. As a result, musicians must now become both multi-faceted and entrepreneurial (Bennett, 2007; Gaunt et al., 2012). We recently argued that there is a significant risk of 'a growing disjuncture between the expectations fostered by conventional pedagogical approaches to professional creative practice, and the lived experience of 'entrepreneurialised' creative work in a contingent market' (Latukefu et al., 2014 p. 2). Many conservatoires began to review and transform their curricula in response to societal changes some years ago through the inclusion of entrepreneurial partnerships and mentoring, portfolio career training and work-integrated learning, but this – in the UK at least – has become an increasingly urgent priority in the

light of neoliberal educational policies and practices. These are embodied for example, in the introduction of the National Student Survey (NSS: 2005), which measures student satisfaction, the (voluntary) Teaching Excellence Framework (2017), which draws on NSS results rather than the evaluation of teaching itself, and the merger of the Higher Education Funding Council of England and the Office for Fair Access into the Office for Students from April 2018. According to Renshaw (2009), UK conservatoires including Trinity College of Music (now Trinity–Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance) and Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, as well as Dutch institutions such as the Prince Claus Conservatoire, Groningen, and the Royal Conservatoire, The Hague, have developed initiatives and innovative approaches, particularly in the area of mentoring; but he argues that, nevertheless, these initiatives ‘rarely constitute core business’ (p. 68).

In an opinion piece published after the Reflective Conservatoire conference held at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in February 2015, Tony Woodcock (President of the New England Conservatory) highlighted the need for a paradigm shift at conservatoires:

Their major premise is that change is inevitable and that failure to change can be fatal. In looking at contemporary society, they discussed the role of a musician, why creativity is important, and how the curriculum needs to reflect these changes. Traditions, as they see it, are in decline as shown by the dwindling jobs in music, audiences, universities, orchestras and music programmes, which now seem to be limited to the economically privileged. They see students already living the change but the training institutions lag behind in their development and thinking (Woodcock, 2015).

Identity formation plays an important role in change for individual musicians and has been researched widely (e.g., MacDonald, Hargreaves & Miell, 2002; Daykin, 2005; Bennett, 2007, 2009; North & Hargreaves, 2008; Creech et al., 2008). Musicians can develop and promote multiple musical identities through portfolio careers, and many leading conservatoires around the world now aspire explicitly to train ‘portfolio’ or ‘multi-faceted’ musicians.

This article reports an analysis of narratives provided by professional portfolio musicians, and students and teachers at a single conservatoire in the UK. The aims of the research were to understand 1) variations between understandings of the concept of portfolio training and 2) why there may be a disjuncture between the expectations fostered by conservatoires undergoing changes in their culture and the lived experiences of teachers and students responding, in real time, to changes both within the conservatoire and in the wider society.

Context and Methodology

In 2010 the first author and colleagues conducted research at a regional university in Australia asking staff and students what they considered to be important qualities for creative arts graduates including musicians, actors, visual artists, graphic designers, creative writers and journalists. The push towards identifying graduate qualities began in Australia in the early 1990s when there was a significant increase in public investment in universities,

which put pressure on the universities to demonstrate that they were achieving worthwhile and relevant outcomes (Woodhouse, 1999; Barrie, 2006). This led in turn to questions about employability, and the extent to which the skills, knowledge and abilities of graduates beyond disciplinary content knowledge were applicable in a range of contexts (Barrie, 2006; Jones, 2009). What emerged from the interviews conducted as part of the 2010 project was that the participants nominated resilience as a necessary quality for graduates. The first author and her colleagues concluded that a portfolio training that provides students with skills for a 'bundle of tasks' was essential for them to keep performing in the world after graduation (Latukeyu et al., 2014).

Building on the findings of the earlier investigation of creative arts graduates, the present authors undertook research at a conservatoire where changes have been made to the curriculum so as to ensure that graduates will be properly equipped for portfolio careers as freelance musicians. The original purpose of the interviews was to explore participants' views of resilience in relation to portfolio careers but this article reports and discusses *only* their understanding of the term 'portfolio career' and how it applies to them and their contemporaries. The quote from Cassandra, at the beginning of this paper, shows a student trying to impose order on her experience of portfolio training in a UK conservatoire.

Participants

Seven students and six teachers at a single conservatoire in the UK responded to invitations to participate in the project. Also participating were four professional musicians who have been working in a variety of ways in the creative arts industry for a considerable number of years and can be described as musicians with successful portfolio careers. All participants were living in the UK when interviewed. Of the teachers, five are now full-time having had substantial careers as professional performers and one teaches students on a one-to-one basis while still maintaining a career as a professional orchestral musician. Three female and four male students were interviewed. One was a post-graduate student; of the undergraduates on the Bachelor of Music programme, three were in their fourth year, one was in their second and two were in their first year of study.

Procedure

Narrative analysis was used in the present study to understand what Cassandra and other participants in the study were experiencing (Daykin, 2005). Interviews were conducted like conversations, at times and in places convenient for the participants such as their homes or offices, and in cafés. Interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. Audio-recordings were made using a *Zoom* handy recorder. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author. Each transcript was sent via email for checking by the participant who had been interviewed, with an invitation to make corrections and additions where appropriate; all participants made use of this opportunity. During the interviews the same warm-up question was posed at the beginning of each interview: 'What do you understand by the term portfolio training?' This was followed by 'What do you understand by the term resilience?' The participant and researcher then continued with a free-flowing conversation about the participant's experience of portfolio training and/or portfolio careers, and sometimes the

participant told personal stories of resilience in regards to their music studies or music career. The first author also sat in on master classes, lectures and rehearsals to help her become familiar with the conservatoire's curriculum and how it was taught. Often she was introduced by the lecturer or tutor at the beginning of class and given the opportunity to say why she was there and tell students about the research. She captured her observations in field notes, which were used to complement and in some cases elucidate the data from the interviews she conducted with participants.

Ethics

A number of ethical issues and tensions may need to be resolved when undertaking Narrative Inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss those that are related to the narrative experiences of participants and 'those that emerge from the grand narrative via the institution' (p.173). Ethical approval was granted by the institutional research ethics committee before the first author began to collect data. All participants were provided with information as to the nature of the research, and gave their informed consent to take part. The participant information sheet emphasized that participants would be asked to express their own understandings of how they develop and maintain their personal and professional resilience as musicians. When the interview data were analysed it became apparent to the researchers that there were variations between the institution's 'grand narrative' of portfolio training and participants' understandings of the term. While the original intention of the researchers was to investigate resilience, definitions and conceptions of portfolio training emerged as a more urgent focus for the present study.

The granting of ethical approval does not obviate the necessity for resolving issues such as those arising from power relationships. Accordingly, it was decided that the first author should recruit participants as she was a visitor to the institution while the second author was a member of the permanent staff and might be perceived as holding a position of authority. The first author describes in her field notes how she went about recruiting students:

I have been given permission by the Head of Vocal Studies to use the all student email list in order to inform [vocal] students who I am and what the research is about. I am going to tell them that I will be sitting working in the cafe and that they should feel free to come up and talk to me if they would like to be part of the research. They can come individually or in pairs or groups (Field notes, March 15, 2015).

Sitting in the cafeteria and allowing students to approach was a way for the researcher to ensure students did not feel pressured into participating and that potential power relationships and tensions between researcher and students would be eased. However, it did compromise the anonymity of the research since other students and staff could see the conversations taking place. It was made clear in the application for ethical approval and the participant information sheet that data would be kept confidential but anonymity could not be guaranteed. The researcher complied, of course, when participants asked for the recording device to be turned off for parts of their interviews, but 'off-the-record' conversations nevertheless influenced the direction of the remainder of such interviews.

By contrast, staff were contacted via email and, if they agreed to participate, the interviews took place privately in their own offices.

Analysis

The first author read the transcriptions of the recorded interviews carefully and highlighted all the passages that were relevant to the research (Smith, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006). When she re-read the transcripts she labelled each highlighted passage with the name of a theme: one or more words representing the gist of the passage. She then clustered the themes into higher-order or 'umbrella' themes.

The results of the thematic analysis are presented as a set of narratives that illustrate the variety of ways in which participants understood the concept of portfolio training.

Narrative 1: Pre-Portfolio Training

The concept of the portfolio career is not new: the majority of conservatoire graduates assume that they will have to do lots of different things if they are going to make a living as a musician. Nevertheless, the narrative of training for portfolio careers is relatively recent in conservatoires, so musicians might not use the term themselves when describing their working lives. Sam graduated more than two decades ago and reported on his training and current working life as follows:

I have never heard of a portfolio career. I am a 48-year-old singer/performer/writer and I have been working in the industry for over 25 years. When I was young I just wanted to be a singer. Actually, I wanted to be a pop singer but my dad said I had to be an opera singer. I forced myself to like opera in order to do what my folks wanted me to do. When I went to college I was expecting it to be more like the movie *Fame* but it was so quiet and there was no life at the first music college I attended.

I switched universities² to find a more vibrant course. In my family there is a lot of kudos attached to being an opera singer. I enjoyed practising but not particularly singing opera. While at college I put on shows in restaurants and persuaded people to do gigs. I always thought I would be an opera star but I was just doing this other stuff while at college to make money. I didn't see this as being something that would happen outside of the time I was in the course.

All of these extra-curricular gigs had to happen outside of the Conservatoire curriculum. Now I sing, write, compose music, produce events, curate collaborative and interdisciplinary work, teach singing, write press releases, and organize fund raising activities. One of the most exhausting things I have to do is talk endlessly to people to get them to believe in the same vision. This includes music directors, dancers, and technicians. I find it exhausting but necessary. If something falls over I have to make sure that everything works in every aspect. I know now I am not going to become an opera singer in the traditional sense of having an agent and singing in an opera company. But opera has now become such a strong part of my identity that I incorporate it into every show that I devise (Sam, professional portfolio musician, 2015).

Katrina studied at a conservatoire before training for portfolio careers was available; rather, the curriculum focused only on advanced instrumental or vocal training in classical repertoire and solo or orchestral performance. Katrina spent four years developing high-level skills as a performer. When she graduated she knew that the likelihood of her being able to make a living as a soloist, or even as an orchestral player, was remote but she did not consider that there had been any onus on the conservatoire to provide her with the tools or skills that she might need to support herself financially. Katrina described her current work and contrasted it with her conservatoire training:

I suppose you could say I am a trombonist who specializes in world music genres. I was trying to decide whether to go to university or conservatoire and was told by my friends to go to uni because it would be much more interesting and I would get to do a much broader range of things. I decided to go to conservatoire and I don't regret it. But, I wanted to learn about music from other cultures and there was no possibility of this at the conservatoire I attended. So I had to go down the road to a different university that did offer world music subjects and pay extra to take these subjects. When I graduated from conservatoire I started out trying to get auditions for orchestras which was what I felt was expected of me but then I found myself becoming more and more involved with groups that played world music and I was getting work with them. I have just come off a world tour with my quartet and tonight I am supporting a singer in a concert and then tomorrow I have to get up early to do a kids show at the local library. I also play at retirement homes, schools, weddings, and lots of community events. I have to play in a few different bands in order to make enough money performing and this can get tricky during certain times of the year.

The best thing about conservatoire was that I knew I had four years to get really really good at my instrument and I had teachers to help me with this. It was also the only time in my life when I was expected to practise a lot and that is what made conservatoire so good. It was difficult learning to organize myself as a small business and get gigs and take care of my tax returns and accounts and I was already earning money from playing music as a student. But I just did it myself. I don't think I would have wanted to do any of that at conservatoire. Although I suppose when I think back on how tricky it was to try and do everything myself maybe it does make sense to give students some training in professional stuff (Katrina, professional musician, 2015).

Sam and Katrina went outside the conservatoire either to learn about other musical genres or to make their own work. Neither of them questioned why they should have to do this; they believed the role of the conservatoire was solely to provide the kind of training that would enable them to develop musical skills of exceptional quality. At that time educational programs such as Work Integrated Learning, in which students participate in employment opportunities related to their field of study and designed to connect classroom learning with on-the-job experiences (Kramer & Usher, 2011) did not yet exist.

Johannes, a second-year undergraduate student, pointed out that it is obvious that musicians will have to develop portfolio careers by engaging in a range of different activities when they graduate. He felt strongly enough about this to initiate a conversation with the first author in the conservatoire cafeteria, reported in an excerpt from her field notes dated March 15th, 2015:

Johannes is a rather nervous, thin young man who approaches me while I am having coffee and says, 'Are you still interested in talking to people?' I ask him what he thinks it means to be a portfolio musician. He interprets this as being what he thinks of the way that the conservatoire pushes the idea of the portfolio musician. He feels that portfolio musician is just such an obvious concept that he can't understand why the college even feels the need to promote it. It just seems like common sense. Everyone knows that they have to be able to do a range of things when they graduate; everyone knows that they have to broaden their horizons. In fact his question is, 'Who are these mythical musicians that aren't trying to broaden their horizons?' They get told all the time how few people make it, standards have gone up, more and more people being educated. It is drilled into them to keep on their toes and keep practising. The best chance you've got is to be adaptable. Don't just focus on one thing, have lots of things.

In an article reporting a study investigating what motivates music students to become performers or music teachers, Parkes and Jones (2011) suggested that

teachers and advisors should increase students' expectancies for success in music performance. Because expectancy for success is conceptually similar to self-efficacy, one could use the well-documented ways of increasing self-efficacy as a means to increase students' expectancies for success in music performance (p.118).

The reason Johannes is doing a degree at conservatoire, he said, is that he wants to spend four years perfecting his ability to perform on his instrument, with no other distractions. He wants the conservatoire to stop reminding him of how few people make it in the industry and support his choice to specialize. This echoes the views of students and staff at a conservatoire in Australia who were strongly critical of its move away from training only elite instrumentalists, singers and composers, destined to work exclusively in the concert hall and opera theatre, towards a more general model of music-making and musician training (Latukeyu et al., 2014). It also echoes Katrina's initial reaction to the threat that she might be diverted from practice by the requirement to attend time-consuming 'extra' classes.

The conservatoire culture has changed significantly since Sam and Katrina graduated. The narrative to which current students are exposed is that the conservatoire has the responsibility of providing students not only with training in composition, instrumental and vocal performance but also skills that are applicable more widely so that graduates will be able to support themselves as portfolio musicians. As part of a research project investigating lifelong learning in music Smilde (2005) asked, 'How can training and environment enable graduates to anticipate and respond to changes and what core competencies to they need?' (p. 2). For example, knowing how to present oneself and be flexible enough to work collaboratively across art forms, gaining 'generic skills including the ability to interact appropriately with presenters and promoters become[s] more and more important' (Renshaw, 2009, p. 2).

Johannes said he doesn't appreciate constantly being reminded of something that he considers common knowledge and Cassandra reported finding it stressful because she sees students being pulled in two different directions. Conservatoires are expected to prepare graduates appropriately but students have commonly chosen to study at a conservatoire

rather than a university, where they know a broader education in music is available, specifically to concentrate on performance or composition. It is often only once they have graduated and spent a few years in the industry that they start to blame the conservatoire for not having taught them all they need to know to survive, let alone flourish.

Narrative 2: A Variety of Understandings of Portfolio Training

John Kenny is an internationally recognized trombonist and self-described multi-faceted performer who was adamant that conservatoires must develop a different model of preparing musicians for life after they graduate, saying:

To develop a true portfolio career for the 21st century, artists need to think not only about supporting themselves (any additional activity to enable them to keep going) or to diversify their performance skills (be able to accept any job offered), it is essential that people are helped to understand how to generate their own project, and to harness both human and financial resources in new and imaginative ways. In a word, to be entrepreneurial artists. The vast majority will be self-employed – and that has always been an entrepreneurial state. Every plumber and carpenter has a ‘portfolio career’. We have to make our society work for us, and with us (Skype interview, July 16th, 2016).

John’s views were echoed strongly by another professional musician, David, supporting Latukefu et al.’s finding (2014) that musicians need to be proficient in a ‘bundle’ of tasks:

Well, portfolio musician for me means that not only can you play your instrument to a very high or sing to a very high level, that goes without saying but that you have other skills such as teaching, doing outreach work or designing websites or running a concert series or creating a composition for a particular event, knowing how concert promoters put their concerts together, concert planning. So everything. Knowing behind the scenes; how music is put on; how it works in educational contexts. The link between product, process, engagement, audience involvement of all shapes and sizes, levels of experience, understanding that world is what think we are trying to do to train musicians to become portfolio musicians. Being able to talk to audiences being able to plan, being able to make decisions, being flexible in their approaches, being able to communicate their passions, taking ownership of their artistic development (David, teacher, 2015).

Interviewees did not necessarily share the same concept of the portfolio musician as multi-skilled and competent in all aspects of music-making, production and communication:

I don’t see portfolio training outside of singing. I just see singing in different contexts as portfolio. So a young singer might sing in a fabulous ensemble, they might have made themselves into a chamber group, they might have done a words and music program with other people, so that is what I see as portfolio (Rhiannon, teacher, 2015).

Orchestral jobs are few and far between and those that come up are highly competed for. I dread to know what the figures are but the amount of people who go into full-time jobs is not a large percentage. So what are people going to do? Which

way are they going to go? They have to face up to reality. And reality is that they may have to do some teaching, with occasional professional gigs (Leonie, teacher, 2015).

I don't know what to do with being good at lots of things. I feel like if you have lots of things but you're not all into one you feel like you're in the middle of something but I don't know what to do with it. I am just lost in general with it. When you are going from music schools it's hard to be hopeful. It's all about specializing (Bridget, fourth-year singer, 2015).

Cassandra, the fourth-year undergraduate cellist quoted at the beginning of this article, strongly supported the notion of portfolio training at conservatoires but she was aware, too, that the term 'portfolio musician' could be perceived as a euphemism for someone who is unable to make it as a professional musician and needs to do other things to support themselves financially. She was not the only student to say this in interviews.

To me, portfolio musician is a term that is bandied around quite a lot. That we hear a lot of and kind of means ahh I dunno it's really hard for some people it's quite a negative term I think. It can mean umm taking your eye off the ball becoming a true musician and having to do the other things mainly as a financial reason because you have to like . . . support yourself in other ways (Cassandra, fourth-year student, 2015).

Daniel, a classical pianist, said he thinks that music graduates find themselves in portfolio careers not by choice but by necessity:

Financial things are a huge part of it I think. I think sometimes people think it's by choice but I think a lot of the time it's initially anyway after conservatoire training it's to get an income. Basically, enough of an income to live. Doing just performing doesn't get enough in so people rely heavily on teaching initially as well and that instantly starts a portfolio career and then a bit of accompaniment work might come in and so yeah. So it can be financial implications not just choices (Daniel, post-graduate student 2015).

Cassandra's view is supported by a number of studies (Huhtanen, 2004, 2008; Bennett & Stanberg, 2007; Polifonia, 2010) in which 'moving into teaching is often seen as a consequence of failing as a performer' (Parkes & Jones, 2011, p. 2). Cassandra considered studio or private teaching to be an obvious part of a musician's portfolio but she also mentioned community engagement such as playing in hospitals. Quite a few students do these gigs, she said, because they agree that playing music as part of community engagement is a good thing to do but they don't see that there is any benefit for them professionally. Cassandra seemed unsure as to how to phrase this to the researcher in such a way that it didn't appear too negative – there were many pauses during the interview and she said 'ummm' a lot while talking about student attitudes to portfolio careers – perhaps because although she believed in the value of the portfolio career she knew that other students didn't feel the same way. She explained why this might be:

But a lot of people see that as again kind of like as a sidetrack to their becoming an amazing violinist or whatever and they don't see that as something that can have a

huge impact on their playing. Umm . . . and enrich their playing. Umm I definitely think that a lot of people think it is a sidetrack to what you actually want to be doing. They see it as something you do because it is a really nice thing to do for the community and it's a great thing to do for a charged concert. I'm the complete opposite. I think that having done concerts and things and organized concerts in hospitals I realize that the best musicians are the ones who can speak to people who aren't musically minded. Sort of like transfer meaning through their playing that everyone can understand. Not necessarily having received the highest musical education. I think that's a great thing at the end of the day you have to be able to yeah like tell those stories to everyone regardless of what their subject is.

Luthiers – string instrument makers – were working in a large public space in the conservatoire during the period that the research was being undertaken, demonstrating their craft and inviting students and members of staff to play new instruments; one group was building a cello. According to the field notes of the first researcher, dated March 9th, 2015:

I spoke to one of the male instrument makers and said I thought that having instrument makers in this place was quite strange and interesting and in some ways a good illustration of how the college is trying to change from that specialised training to a more portfolio career with broader skills available.

He said actually his impression was that rather than being interested in broader skills he felt the students who he saw were even more focused on the narrow goal of becoming performers. He thought that the fee paying students, in particular, the international students were very competitive and that he couldn't see any evidence at all of students being interested in a portfolio of broader skills. The makers come in and set up their tools and workshop. They make an instrument, which is bought from them by the college. They also run workshops in instrument making and instrument repair. He felt the college could have made so much more out of the entire experience. They are set up in quite a good spot but there are absolutely no students looking at what is going on.

One of the female instrument makers (there are three men and one woman) said that a third-year cellist had said she was coming along to the instrument repair workshop and her impression was that this girl had suddenly realised that this might be a useful skill to have when she is away from the college and possibly teaching. Another of the male instrument makers said that he thought the college likes the theory of a portfolio career but actually isn't interested in the actual reality of what a portfolio training might involve. They don't see instrument making as being anything to do with what they actually do.

Vanessa was a second-year undergraduate violinist who approached the first author in the cafeteria between classes. She wanted to discuss the different projects she was involved in and in particular her main passion: her string quartet.

Initially when I came here my aspirations were to participate in a quartet, become a really good quartet, getting a sort of miniature business-like quartet thing, getting gigs, start to earn money basically. That's not quite gone to plan. Obviously I'm doing lots

of orchestral playing um but it's always tricky to find a specific group. This is what I'm struggling with at the moment. Finding a good group at the college that really gels that can work together and become our own business.

She understood the term 'portfolio career' to mean playing in different sorts of ensembles but being willing to create your own opportunities as well, which involves making connections and networking. She considered volunteering at festivals an important part of portfolio training because it gave her the chance to network. Meanwhile, she said would like to run the quartet as a business, eventually, but she admitted that the conservatoire's emphasis on the lack of jobs and the need to make your own opportunities did cause her some stress:

It's not like you graduate here, you've got your degree, you walk into a job with x amount salary. You need to use your people skills and form your contacts and that is a stressful thing. It's stressful trying to link and basically be your own manager. I suppose you're forming your own concerts and opportunities and that is where another level of stress comes in.

Vanessa was very positive about the opportunities the conservatoire had given her string quartet to perform at a range of events. She described the conservatoire as acting as their manager and organising everything so they just had to turn up and play.

Because we are still students I think there is less of a pressure to be businesslike or more decisive in that sense. We can almost rely on the college to um give opportunities for which we can work towards. So I think that definitely being a student it takes that sort of role away from us.

Narrative 3: Portfolio training and identity change

Despite being exposed to the narrative of portfolio training Daniel felt that during his four years at conservatoire it was in fact frowned-upon to do anything other than work hard at achieving the highest levels of skill on his instrument and as a performer. The stress of preparing to embark on a performing career took its toll on Daniel, as it does so often on final-year undergraduate students, and it was only after he graduated that he began thinking about developing a new, different identity as a music therapist. His specialized training as a classical pianist had not prepared him well for this change to music therapy, however, since it had not included the study of improvisation. Nevertheless once he had decided to switch pathways and had actually begun studying music therapy he started enjoying playing music again.

In my fourth year leading up to my final recital I really had loads of pressure both from myself and externally and I started to hate the piano. I hated what I was doing but I had to keep working at it to get the best mark I could for my final.

At times I almost lost why I came in to it in the first place. And I realized that I'm a people person and I have always wanted to use music to communicate a message or to work with people and help people in some way. I felt very boxed

in in my practice room. I felt like I was perfecting myself rather than being able to reach out.

It genuinely was a battle for the first two years while I was here because I felt very selfish by practising the whole time. Because I wasn't giving anything while I was practising. After I graduated I realized that actually working in the community is so much more where my heart was and that's when I decided to go into music therapy and use my musical training in an improvisational way so in a completely different context on a completely different style. Doing musical therapy you have to use whatever musical idiom is appropriate or beneficial at the time. You are not expected to be an expert in every style of playing because you physically couldn't but if a Middle Eastern genre is most useful or jazz you should be flexible as a musician so having those four years of classical hardcore sheet music no improvisation for four years I was suddenly like whoa. It was a challenge but I was loving it. I suddenly felt like something clicked and I felt like for those four years I had been trying to fit into something that wasn't quite fitting. And then it felt like it was fitting (Daniel, post-graduate classical pianist, 2015).

Daniel was perhaps typical of students of classical piano, until the early 2000s, in that the message he received from his training was that that by attending a conservatoire he had chosen to orient himself towards, and positively anticipated his future as a concert pianist (Penuel & Wertsch 1995), or at the very least a chamber musician. Daniel felt that he had been taught how he should live his life as a professional pianist. Yet towards the end of his degree course he began to experience anxiety and loss of enjoyment when playing the piano. When he found that he could use music in a way that mattered to him he started enjoying it again. But his training lacked a component that was to prove vital in his ultimate choice of career as a music therapist: improvisation.

Conclusion

While a relatively small sample of participants was interviewed, and those who were teachers and students were at the same institution, they understood the concept of portfolio training in a variety of ways. Some interpreted it as enabling students not only to play their instrument or sing to a very high degree of expertise but also to develop other skills such as teaching, doing outreach work, designing websites and running concert series. They spoke of the need for students to gain a meta-knowledge of how concert promoters put their concerts together; how things work behind the scenes; how music is put on; how it works in educational contexts and how important it is for students to take ownership of their artistic development. Others had a much narrower understanding of the concept. They did not think that portfolio training should extend beyond the specialism of the musician. Rather, they thought it should simply give students the opportunity to learn to be flexible, capable of performing in different contexts ranging from large ensembles such as orchestras and opera choruses to chamber groups and solo roles. Meanwhile, the instrument makers visiting the conservatoire thought that its concept of portfolio training was quite narrow and that the music students they had talked to were still more focused on their specialist training than in developing broader portfolio careers. The second-year undergraduate student's outlook differed from that of the older students, which could suggest that changes not only in the

institution's narrative but also to its curriculum, highlighting the value of portfolio training, is now making an impact on students from one year to the next.

Research on lifelong learning draws attention to the importance of generic skills for students entering changing work environments. Renshaw (2009), in particular, argues that one such environment, requiring musicians to develop portfolio careers, is the contemporary music industry. This research is still relatively recent and it is taking time for its findings and recommendations to reach those responsible for training musicians. This could, in part, account for the variety of ways in which teachers conceptualise the aims and nature of portfolio training.

Some parallels can be drawn with the situation in the early 2000s when universities around the world sought to articulate the generic knowledge and skills their graduates should, and actually possess. Research carried out in Australia, for example, found that 'academics hold qualitatively different conceptions of the phenomenon of graduate attributes, in terms of what is learned and how such outcomes are achieved' (Barrie, 2004, p. 263). In relation to the attributes of music graduates, Bennett (2007) emphasized how important it is for 'students to see the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of pursuing a composite career incorporating a variety of roles and interests' (p. 13). This has implications for policy and practice in conservatoires, bearing in mind that individual teachers implement portfolio training in different ways and to different extents, depending on how they conceptualise it, but it is likely that shared understandings of the concept will begin to emerge in particular conservatoires just as shared understandings of graduate qualities have begun to develop within individual faculties in universities. If this takes place naturally it will be a slow process. It may be forced to take place faster in response to government initiatives designed to increase student satisfaction and employability.

Arguably even more difficult than developing shared understanding is the process of turning policy into practice. Policies in each institution are based on espoused theories of portfolio training (Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985; Jones, 2009); practice requires action on the part of managers, internally, conservatoire, and/or national bodies, externally to review, inspect and renew all aspects of the curriculum to support portfolio training. For example, there are currently inconsistencies between the theory of portfolio training espoused by the conservatoire and the practical requirements of the curriculum embodied in traditional pathways and teaching methods, as illustrated by the classical pianist Daniel who found that on graduation he lacked the improvisational skills he would need to be an effective music therapist.

Portfolio training involves more than teaching, however: another disjuncture between espoused theory and actual practice was provided by Vanessa, who described the conservatoire as 'taking away the role' of learning to organise and promote events such as concerts and productions such as operas. By assigning these roles to staff and requiring students only to turn up, rehearse and perform, conservatoires thus rob their students of the opportunity to learn new skills and practise them as embedded, engaged and embodied ways of learning in action (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009; Boud, 2010; Sykes & Dean, 2013).

Finally, the findings of the present study indicate that in future research it would be worth exploring the educational backgrounds of conservatoire students and the extent to which these might have an impact upon their understandings of portfolio careers.

Notes

- 1 Pseudonyms have been used for participants unless they specifically requested that we use their real names.
- 2 During his interview Sam used the terms 'university' and 'college' interchangeably. In both cases he was referring to tertiary-level music education at a conservatoire.

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