Revisiting the Role of the Lecture: Integration Within a New Learning and Teaching Model

Mr. Ryan Daniel, James Cook University

Ryan.Daniel@jcu.edu.au

Abstract

In the Australian higher education context, the lecture is traditionally adopted as the principal mode of delivery for learning and teaching across the majority of academic areas. In fact to some extent, the largely one-way dissemination of content to large audiences has been viewed as a fundamental requirement for learning and teaching, despite increasing class sizes and subsequent potential for the reduction in opportunities to both promote and engage in interaction with students. While the study of music has often had the privilege of smaller class sizes, with this scenario offering the opportunity for greater levels of student involvement in the learning process, many courses now involve sizable classes as economic factors impact significantly on higher education. At the same time, recent Government initiatives in raising the profile of learning and teaching have led to many opportunities to revisit existing procedures. This paper outlines the design and trial of a new method of delivery of an introductory music history subject, and which involves a combination of occasional lectures alongside self-paced and modularised study using text/audio resources and an online learning platform. The rationale for and design of the new mode of delivery and course content is initially outlined, after which an overview of student reflective feedback obtained at the conclusion of the course is presented. The findings of this practice-based research project offer a number of implications for higher education learning and teaching.

Keywords: Learning and Teaching, Higher Education, Music

Introduction

Higher education learning and teaching is a progressive field, with new methodologies and approaches to learning and teaching emerging as a result of an increasing emphasis on student experiences and learning outcomes (Ramsden 2003, Biggs 2003). In the Australian context, recent government initiatives known as the Nelson reforms have further contributed to the rationale for a significant revisiting of the methodologies by which higher education students learn across disciplines. University academics are increasingly required to pursue a reflective and evaluative process in order to enhance the way in which students engage with subjects and courses; indeed "the enhancement of university teaching is a genuine scholarly activity" (James Cook University, 1999, p. 2). This revisiting of approaches to learning and teaching has included an investigation of the outcomes presented by a range of formats, including large class, tutorials and small group

work. Another significant issue to emerge recently is the notion of flexible learning, not just in the context of 'distance' education, but in terms of creating a wide range of opportunities for students to engage with the learning environment (Collis & Moonen 2001, Biggs 2003, Ramsden 2003).

For many years, the lecture has been the cornerstone of University teaching (Cannon 1988, Gibbs & Jenkins 1992, Biggs 2003, Ramsden 2003). The major benefit of this form of instruction is the opportunity to deliver information to a large cohort of students, with disadvantages including the potentials for loss of concentration and/or low-level learning due to ineffective listening (Cannon 1988, Biggs 2003). Arguments in the negative are strong, for example Biggs argues that the lecture is "quite ineffective for stimulating *higher-order thinking*" (p. 100). Indeed while there are various authors who suggest strategies by which to enhance lecture delivery (e.g. Biggs 2003, Ramsden 2003), there are argued issues of concern when using this format as the principal method for learning, particularly if independent learning is to be encouraged; Biggs even argues that the lecture has attracted "an authority it does not deserve" (p. 115). At the same time, it would appear that it is not necessarily the lecture however that is problematic; Gibbs & Jenkins (1992) argue that it can even be the actual course structures that "leave students dependent on being taught" (p. 161). This then raises two significant questions:

- What are appropriate mechanisms by which to have students actively engage with subject content and achieve the intended learning outcomes?
- What class formats or approaches to instruction best support independent and deep learning?

A music context

In higher education, the teaching of music has often been afforded the luxury of small classes, and which still often involves the increasingly challenged one to one model of instruction (Horsbrugh 1998, Daniel 2004). In recent years however, some institutions (e.g. James Cook University) have started to offer large lecture-oriented courses that appeal to a wider audience e.g. music appreciation courses such as histories of rock, classical or jazz styles. The challenges of large group teaching have therefore become increasingly relevant to the music discipline.

This research project emerged as an outcome of an ongoing process of reflection and revision to an introductory music history subject. The course, involving an overview of western art music history, provides students with opportunities to develop foundation skills in historical awareness and judgement, aural analysis, and research. Representative content from a range of musical periods and genres is chosen and which provides students with opportunities to engage with the key principles relevant to the milestones in music history. The course was traditionally offered via a two-hour lecture, with the online learning platform Blackboard used to supplement the learning within class time and act as a tutorial, via the provision of a range of directed study tasks including revision questions, suggestions for further study, and discussion forums.

At the time of the 2004 offering of the course, there were 74 students enrolled, 51 of who were elective students and the remaining 23 music majors. Mid-way through the semester, it became noticeable that attendance was variable from week to week. This may have been due to the scheduled time slot for the lecture (5-7pm), the fact that lectures were not compulsory, the relative success of the lecturer's delivery of the materials, or the fact that the Blackboard site included pre- and post-lecture notes and expected learning requirements. This latter hypothesis was supported when many students indicated informally that the resources provided were sufficient to enable them to work independently without the need for attendance at all lectures. A decision was subsequently made to investigate this further, in order to explore the relative value of the face-to-face teaching.

Methodology phase one

A short e-survey was chosen as the most efficient method to investigate student perceptions concerning class time, given that it could be completed at any time and the Blackboard program would collate and analyse the data. As it would be an optional task, a short survey was prepared and which would be relatively simple for students to respond to, with a majority of multiple answer questions and a small number of open responses required. In the event, the e-survey was made available to students over a three-week period and all students strongly encouraged to complete the survey.

Student perceptions – the role of the lecture

At the end of the three-week period, 14 music majors (60.9%) and 42 elective students (79.2%) completed the survey, representing an overall response rate of 77.4%. Of the total sample, 24 were males (42.8%) and 32 female (57.2%). In terms of age, 21 (37.5%) were less than 20, 30 (53.6%) aged between 21 and 25, and five (8.9%) aged 26 or over. The first question required the students to indicate their primary reason for attending lectures (Table 1).

Table 1

Primary purpose for attending lectures

Response	Music Majors		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Taking notes	3	21.4	15	35.7	18	32.1
Listening to the lecture	8	57.15	23	54.8	31	55.4
Supplementing the set chapters in the text	1	7.15	0	0	1	1.8
Supplementing the lecture notes placed in Blackboard	2	14.3	4	9.5	6	10.7

The results were arguably not surprising in that they propose that the majority of students attend for the purposes of being exposed to the delivery of information and course

content. In order to clarify this, the students were asked to identify their typical approach following the lecture, the data summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Students' typical post-lecture learning strategy

Response	Music Majors		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Formalise your notes			4	9.5	**4**	**7.1**
Access Blackboard to obtain lecture notes	11	78.6	18	42.9	**29**	**51.8**
Borrow a friend's notes						
File the notes for future study and revision	3	21.4	20	47.6	**23**	**41.1**

The data in Table 2 further evidence the fact that just over half the class would typically rely on the lecture notes placed in Blackboard after the lecture. This would initially suggest that many students attend without necessarily engaging in intensive listening and/or note-taking given that they are able to access key lecture notes following each session. This data was particularly interesting for the researcher as teacher in the sense of questioning to a large extent the impact of the lecture and its efficiencies in the learning process, although it was important to keep in mind the fact that it was used largely as a vehicle for transmission of key data and relevant principles. In order to consider this further, the students were asked to indicate the extent to which the lectures extended upon the course materials provided; these materials including the set text, recordings, pre- and post-lecture notes (Table 3).

Table 3

Students' perceptions of the impact of face-to-face contact on learning

Response	Music Majors		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Not at all						
2. Somewhat significantly			15	35.7	**15**	**26.8**
3. Moderately significantly	7	50.0	17	40.5	**24**	**42.9**
4. More than moderately significantly	5	35.7	7	16.7	**12**	**21.4**
5. Very significantly	2	14.3	3	7.1	**5**	**8.9**
Mean: 3.125, SD: 0.91						

The data are positive but not overwhelmingly so, with only 30.3% of all students arguing a significant impact on their learning. Hence the next question required students to indicate the number of lectures they had attended. See Table 4.

Table 4

Attendance at scheduled lecture sessions

Response	Music Majors		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1			1	2.4	**1**	**1.8**
2						
3			1	2.4	**1**	**1.8**
4						
5			2	4.8	**2**	**3.6**
6			4	9.5	**4**	**7.1**
7			1	2.4	**1**	**1.8**
8			9	21.4	**9**	**16.1**
9			5	11.9	**5**	**8.9**
10	2	14.3	7	16.6	**9**	**16.1**
11			2	4.8	**2**	**3.6**
12	6	42.85	5	11.9	**11**	**19.6**
13	6	42.85	5	11.9	**11**	**19.6**

The data were initially surprising and higher in attendance rate than expected. At the same time, nearly one-third of the class (32.2%) attended eight or less classes. In order to clarify this issue, the students were asked to identify the extent to which they felt it necessary to attend lectures. Table 5 presents the data.

Table 5

Students' perceptions of the necessity to attend lectures

Response	Music Majors*		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Not at all	1	7.7	1	2.4	**2**	**3.6**
Somewhat essential	1	7.7	14	33.3	**15**	**27.3**
Moderately essential	3	23.1	12	28.6	**15**	**27.3**
More than moderately essential	5	38.4	9	21.4	**14**	**25.4**
Absolutely essential	3	23.1	6	14.3	**9**	**16.4**

*One music major indicated "Don't really know"

It is interesting that over half the class (57.9%) argued that at best, it was only moderately essential to attend lectures. In order to consider these data relative to students' overall experiences of lectures in higher education, they were asked to consider the extent to which several learning formats excited and/or extended their learning, using a five-point scale 1 *not at all* to 5 *to a very significant extent*. These data are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6

Students' perceptions of the impact of higher education learning contexts

Type of learning environment	Number responses	Mean	SD
Lectures	55	3.2	1.03
Tutorials	46	3.24	1.34
Workshops	36	3.19	1.10
Practicals	37	3.40	1.19
Demonstrations	38	3.61	1.19

While the data are indicative of one student group only, they are interesting in that they triangulate with 57.9% of students who argued that it was at best moderately essential to attend the class time relevant to this research project. It is also interesting that those classes that typically involve a higher level of interaction/discussion than the lecture are rated more highly, a view which is supported in the literature e.g. Cannon 1988, Biggs 2003, Ramsden 2003. Finally, the students were asked to indicate possibilities for enhancing the subject delivery.   Of the sample, eleven students did not comment. Twenty-nine valid responses received, the data summarised in Table 7.

Table 7

Students' views on possible enhancements to the subject

Potential enhancement	Number responses	%
Positive responses – no enhancements required	7	24.1
Increase focus on musical concepts (analysis)	8	27.6
Post full lecture notes before lecture	6	20.7
Increase interaction and practical demonstrations	5	17.2
Alter content (unspecified)	3	10.4

These various data proposed a number of directions for the research as teacher. While these data were indicative of one cohort, it was arguable that the manner in which the subject was offered be improved and student experience further enhanced. The next stage involved the development of a new methodology for trial delivery of the subject, and which would encompass the findings of the first phase of data collection.

Methodology phase two

A number of possibilities were considered in the light of the literature on higher education learning and teaching. One of the key points in relation to the lecture format, and raised by several authors (Cannon 1988, Biggs 2003, Ramsden 2003), was the argued

benefits of significant discussion and/or interaction within class time, and which would assist in reducing the potential for loss of concentration and interest. Other strategies included suggestions to consolidate learning via testing at the end of a lecture, incorporation of a range of audio/visual aids to support learning strategies, involving students in group discussions or activities such as problem-solving tasks, and pursuing variety in delivery at all times. An interesting view by Gibbs & Jenkins (1992) was the notion of treating contact time with students as "precious time" (p. 162) and to make the most out of the experience and opportunity. Given that a range of strategies were therefore possible, it was deemed relevant to establish the desired learning goals and map these against required delivery tools and chosen context. Table 8 summarises the process.

Table 8

Mapping process: learning goals towards chosen contexts

Learning goals	Required delivery tools	Chosen context
To provide students with an opportunity to engage in flexible and student-led learning	Platform for the provision of self-directed learning tasks and opportunity for levels of engagement	Blackboard (LearnJCU)
To provide students with a range of key sources by which to develop knowledge and understanding	Provision of a text book, accompanying CDs and interactive CD-rom supporting musical concepts	Set learning resources
To promote deep learning and reinforcement of key concepts	Provision of additional resources and guidance that further enhance key principles and deep learning	Additional recommended resources
To engage students in an environment which is stimulating and challenging and with frequent opportunities for interaction and discussion	Presentation of concept/principle oriented classes with a significant emphasis on interaction, group work and contribution to the learning environment	Interactive classes
To provide students with a range of options as to how to proceed across learning frameworks and curricula	Provision of guidance and advice in terms of flexible learning options and pursuit of individual learning pathway	Staff consultations

Thus the decision making process in Table 8 proposed the following holistic, and more importantly, student-centred learning universe, seen as Figure 1.
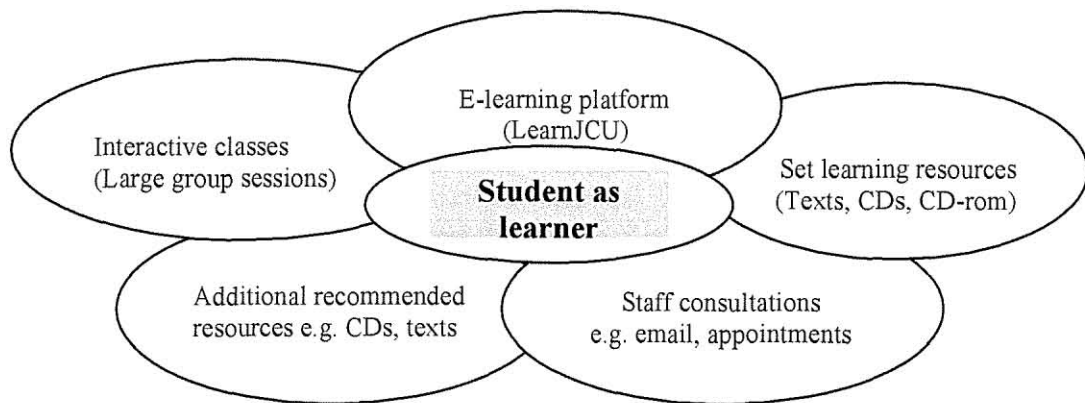
Figure 1. **Interlocking opportunities for student engagement and learning**

The framework for learning thus reflected the third theory of learning for higher education proposed by Ramsden (2003), where knowledge of the content is "constituted by the learner ... [and] is something the student does, rather than something that is done to the student" (p. 111). The new format for delivery that was subsequently chosen was an effective balance of class time alongside self-paced study. Class time would be utilized to reinforce independent learning and promote interaction and exchange, while significant direction would be provided for students in self-paced study periods, including regular opportunities for consultation. In the event, it was decided that the course content would be structured according to the following progression, to fall within the standard University teaching period of thirteen weeks (Table 9).

Table 9

Course progression and learning structure

Module	Week(s)	Delivery mode	Content
1. The elements and origins of music	1	Interactive class	Introduction and Key elements of music
	2-4	Self-paced study	Monophony to polyphony
	5	Interactive class	Critical review of key developments
2. Critical developments of the 18th and 19th centuries	6-8	Self-paced study	The eras of classicism and romanticism
	9	Interactive class	Critical review of key developments
3. Innovations and future directions	10-12	Self-paced study	20th century styles and emerging trends
	13	Interactive class	Critical review of key developments

In addition to developing this structure, a number of learning strategies and assessment tasks were developed in order to enhance student progression and skill development:

- The provision of detailed guidance in Blackboard regarding the required course of study, expected learning outcomes, and corresponding to a range of resources (audio, visual, text);

- Provision of detailed directions to promote three levels of engagement with the content (level 1 – *basic learning* to level 3 – *deep learning*);
- Guidance as to a range of additional resources for further study and reflection, including public concerts, art exhibitions and lectures;
- The provision of a range study/reflection strategies and mechanisms e.g. study questions, mock tests etc; and
- The establishment and monitoring of an online discussion forum to promote shared learning experiences and reflection.

In terms of the assessment for the subject, students would be required to undertake a number of tasks, and which would reflect the minimum policy requirement of at least 50% invigilated assessment. The goal of the assessment schedule was to allow for consolidated learning, flexibility and variety. The chosen tasks were:

- Three short class tests (10%) at the end of each module i.e. weeks 5, 9 and 13;
- One major assignment (40%) involving the choice of a musicological essay, music and advertising project, development of a learning resource or listening diary, or approved own choice; and
- A final summative testing process (30%) requiring students to identify and reflect on key aural examples from the literature and the relationship between works of different styles and periods.

In order to investigate student perceptions regarding the success or otherwise of this new model for learning, a short e-survey was developed and which would require students to anonymously offer a range of feedback on the course structure and progression. This would effectively enable the researcher to consider the extent to which any changes were required across the semester in addition to creating a body of evaluative/reflective data relevant to the project. It was planned that three short e-surveys would be developed and students requested to complete them shortly after completing each module of study. Similarly to the first methodology phase, Blackboard was used given its flexibility for completion and efficiencies in collating and analysing the data.

Preliminary student feedback

At the time of submitting this paper, reflective feedback on the first module of study had been obtained from 44 of the 64 participating students (completion rate of 68.8%). Table 10 provides a picture of the sample in terms of age.

Table 10

Overview of student cohort

Aspect	Music Majors		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Aged 20 or less	12	100	17	53.125	**29**	**65.9**
Aged 21-25			13	40.625	**13**	**29.5**
Aged 26-35			1	3.125	**1**	**2.3**
Aged 36+			1	3.125	**1**	**2.3**

As would be expected, the majority of students are less than 25 years of age. Students were then asked to describe their initial reaction to learning that the subject was to be offered using a combination of self-paced study alongside occasional face-to-face classes. The responses are synthesised in Table 11.

Table 11

Initial reactions to new learning model

Initial reaction	Music Majors		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I was excited at this format	2	16.6	19	59.4	**21**	**47.7**
I was a little nervous at this format	6	50	7	21.9	**13**	**29.5**
I was neutral at this format	2	16.7	3	9.35	**5**	**11.4**
I was disappointed at this format	2	16.7	3	9.35	**5**	**11.4**

It is not surprising that there were a range of reactions at the new format, although the reason(s) for this could be many and arguably personal and not pedagogically driven. At the same time, it was initially surprising that the majority of students (nearly half the group) reacted with excitement at the new format. Table 12 synthesises the reactions from students after successfully completing the first module. In order to create a realistic view, the survey was deliberately launched after the first class test was completed and results posted, in order to promote accurate student reflection on the module requirements. All students successfully passed the first multiple-choice test, with an average weighting of 6.69 out of 10 for music majors and 7.72 for elective students.

Table 12

Degree of satisfaction with delivery following completion of module one

Initial reaction	Music Majors		Elective students		Totals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Extremely satisfied			5	15.6	**5**	**11.4**
Very satisfied	5	41.7	14	43.8	**19**	**43.2**
Moderately satisfied	3	25	10	10	**13**	**29.5**
Somewhat satisfied	4	33.3	2	6.2	**6**	**13.6**
Not at all satisfied			1	3.1	**1**	**2.3**

In order to further clarify this response, students were also asked to indicate reasons why they presented the relevant rating in Table 12. Table 13 summarises the various comments presented.

Table 13

Synthesis of explanatory comments relevant to degree of student satisfaction

Broad comment	No. music majors	No. elective students	% of all comments
Self-paced study suits my learning style and/or study timetable	2	9	**25.6**
It was more enjoyable and I learnt more than I thought	3	5	**18.6**
I have no problems with the way it is delivered	1	4	**11.6**
I enjoyed the interactive nature of the lecture		2	**4.7**
I would prefer more regular contact	2	6	**18.6**
Success depends on student diligence	3	4	**16.3**
I sometimes feel overwhelmed by content		1	**2.3**
Greater detail would be better		1	**2.3**

It is firstly significant that over half of the students (top four comments in Table 13 – 60.5%) report positives or benefits from this approach to learning. While some argue the need for a greater level of face-to-face contact, it is possible that this may always be the case in education contexts, while at the same time this view may be less common at the next point(s) of survey data gathering as students are arguably more comfortable with the process. It is also a mature view from those students (16.3%) who refer to the need to establish a suitable work ethic during the self-paced study periods, rather than relying on lecture notes and face-to-face contact. Indeed, of those that indicated that they were "somewhat satisfied", the reasons identified relate to needing further contact with the lecturer for the purposes of providing notes or direction, and which does not necessarily support the notion of developing independent learning skills.

Conclusions and Directions

While this research project is in its early phase, and a more substantial body of reflective data is required in order to draw definitive conclusions, it is pleasing for the teacher as researcher to view the initial feedback, which paints a relatively positive picture for the student participants.   While it is clear that some students will find that the lack of regular student-teacher contact offers challenges for them, it is possible that this may always be the case, indeed this may diminish over time. The preliminary data also proposes that if well constructed, alternative modes of delivery can engage students effectively and efficiently.

References

Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at University*, 2nd ed. Maidenhead, England: SRHE and Open University Press.

Cannon, R. (1988). *Lecturing*. Kensington, Australia: Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Collis, B. & Moonen, J. (2001). *Flexible learning in a digital world: Experiences and expectations*. London: Kogan Page.

Daniel, R. (2004). Innovations in piano pedagogy: A small group model for the tertiary level. *Music Education Research*, 6(1), 23-43.

Gibbs, G. & Jenkins, A. (Eds) (1992). *Teaching large classes in higher education.* London: Kogan Page.

Horsbrugh, I. (1998). *Shape the future... rather than walk backwards into it.* Lecture presented at the Queensland Conservatorium, Brisbane Australia.

James Cook University (1999). *Evaluation of teaching framework document*, Townsville, Australia: James Cook University.

Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to teach in higher education*, 2nd ed. London: RoutledgeFalmer.