

**CHALLENGING THE ORTHODOXY:
AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY FOR THE
TERTIARY TEACHING OF PIANO**

A thesis

submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of
the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

at

James Cook University

by

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2005

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Support for the completion of the thesis was obtained via the following sources

Fees:

Funded by a James Cook University Research Training Scheme place.

Any other assistance:

Two periods of teaching relief were funded by the Research and International Division, James Cook University, in 2001 and 2004.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I approached the commencement of this project with great energy, with a strong sense of commitment, a willingness to accept whatever trials and tribulations lay along the way, and with a fundamental belief in the potential outcomes of the research. To reach the end is quite exhilarating. At the same time, however, the road was far from smooth, and at many points along the way there were questions in my mind as to whether the end would ever be reached or even if the project would adequately realise the research aims and goals. Admittedly, this was in part due to the challenges of maintaining a commitment to both an intensive academic work profile alongside an equally demanding research project and, while to some extent, there existed a nexus between the two, the dual commitment was often difficult to manage. Ultimately, there were frustrations and rewards, sighs and smiles, groans and grins; however the underlying determination that I brought to the project meant that I was committed to see it through to completion. To reach the final summit of academic research training would not, however, have been possible without a little help from my friends.

The journey relied primarily on the direction and the guidance of my principal supervisor Professor Diana Davis, a remarkable mentor, who encouraged me at all times to take risks, to be innovative and explorative, and to apply a rigorous research frame that would lead to a thesis with data-driven findings and significant outcomes. In a field dominated by a lack of theoretical underpinnings and frameworks, there were many occasions where I felt a bleakness and sense of isolation as to how to proceed, and it was at these points that my eyes were opened to strategies to move forward that I would perhaps have taken much longer to see. For Diana's support, guidance and sheer hard work whilst also leading a healthy postgraduate program and creative arts school, I remain forever grateful.

Along the way I have received support from others, including Professor Malcolm Gillies in the early stages of the research design, from my colleagues in their reminders to be patient but persistent, and from the University in their support of my research place and in providing teaching relief and the traditional student support mechanisms. I must also thank those participants in the study; numerous students who obliged the

completion of many questionnaires, interviews etc, and for willingly being cajoled and pushed to participate in a new and somewhat challenging experience. Students were very supportive of the project at all times and largely pleased to have participated in ground-breaking research. I am blessed to have had a great deal of encouragement and support from my wife Leah, who not only managed to keep me relatively sane in the final stages of the process, but who at all times reminded me of the big picture in life. With her and now our daughter Maria, we embark on new challenges and commitments. An appropriate balance between academia and life beyond can be difficult to achieve for one who is passionate about music, about hard work, and about learning and teaching. There can be no better reminder of the right balance than the smiles of a beautiful wife and daughter.

The journey from undergraduate student to PhD is fascinating, occasionally frightening, exhilarating, yet demanding and challenging. It is not easy. The training however is outstanding in the way that it develops one's capacity to use one's intellectual abilities, and, in particular, critical thinking skills. Without question, I now feel equipped to operate solo and to establish a research trajectory that will further develop the research findings outlined in this thesis. This journey will be filled with new challenges and rewards and I look forward to what the future brings, not only with the confidence to stand on my own two feet, but with a passionate commitment to further research and the pursuit of knowledge.

ABSTRACT

This thesis outlines the rationale for and development of a small group piano teaching model for application in the Australian higher education environment. Initially, the history and development of the piano learning and teaching profession is investigated, prior to a synthesis of the research literature and perceptions of piano pedagogies in action, which reveal a number of issues of concern in relation to the efficacies and efficiencies of existing methods and models of learning. The first phase methodology involves the investigation of piano pedagogies in action, via reflections obtained during in-depth interviews with committed learners and post tertiary individuals, analysis of video footage of piano teaching, and an examination of models of advanced student group teaching obtained via questionnaires. The emerging principles from this first phase feed into the second phase methodology and development of the small group model and learning environment for higher education piano students. The resultant four-year trial of a small-group model is then outlined and evaluated via participant questionnaires, teacher reflections, video analysis of interaction, and student self-reflective data. The findings propose a number of implications and possible directions for instrumental teaching at the tertiary level.

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