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Daniel, Ryan, and Parkes, Kelly A. (2025) *The Applied Music Studio: A Decade of Research and Inquiry*. In: Daniel, Ryan, and Parkes, Kelly, (eds.) *The Applied Studio Model in Higher Music Education: Critical Perspectives and Opportunities*. Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, UK. pp. 3-12.

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Please refer to the original source for the final version of this work:

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003426448%2D2>

The Applied Music Studio: A Decade of Research and Inquiry

The applied music studio at its best provides intense inspiration and instruction for musicians, yet at its worst can alienate and demotivate students. Mostly widely known as one-to-one teaching, in the master-apprentice model, the challenges of teaching in the applied studio have been studied for over two decades. This chapter reviews the most recent body of work and provides an overview of practical findings from the research.

The Applied Music Studio: A Decade of Research and Inquiry

Ryan Daniel and Kelly A. Parkes

This chapter reviews the body of literature generated by the authors, focused on the applied music studio. The areas of research are grouped in themes, such as influences on teachers, teacher-student behaviors and interactions, analyses of lessons, teacher motivation and identity, assessment, and professional development. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings and suggestions for future research.

As is widely known in the discourse concerning the history of music teaching, the dominant method for learning an instrument or voice is through the one-to-one model, or what is also known as the applied music studio. Students as ‘apprentices’ largely follow the directives of the teacher as ‘master’, the latter leading the transactions that occur, the balance of activities during the lesson, and the directions as to where the student should proceed following the lesson. Many of the greatest composers of the western art tradition gave lessons in their lifetime, be this at the bequest of a benefactor, or in order to sustain a living. For instance, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven gave lessons and guided students. Moving into the 19th century, history documents the rise of the great performer-teachers, the majority of whom were pianists, with perhaps the most well-known being Franz Liszt and the virtuoso violinist Paganini. Liszt became somewhat of an icon of this great performer-teacher tradition, after which there was a stream of notable greats, such as pianists Leschetizky, Busoni and Schnabel.

At its best, the applied studio offers a powerful method of instruction and for learning, with students able to develop their skills and confidence in performing repertoire, be this western art music or contemporary popular styles. At its worst, it can result in feelings of isolation, have minimal impact, result in personality conflicts, or even cause students to lose

their interest in music as an art form. Despite these potential scenarios, the dominance of applied studio teaching as the principal format for learning remains to this day. Students of all ages around the world learn in this system, be it privately in the home or at teachers' studios, at school, or at tertiary level in such institutions as conservatoires, colleges and universities. While it is the dominant model of learning and teaching, there is an emerging discourse around the value of small-group learning for advanced students, this value achieved via the potential for peer assessment and learning, and exposure to additional teacher-student interactions not possible in the one-to-one setting (Daniel, 2004; Mitchell, 2020).

In terms of recent literature, there are generally agreed themes in the discourse about the applied studio model, these including the fact that teachers at the advanced level are often recruited on the basis of their performance expertise rather than their pedagogical skills (Williamson et al., 2019; Mitchell, 2020), formal programs to prepare applied studio teachers are relatively rare (Blackwell, 2018; Simones, 2017; Yeh, 2018), while at the same time there is an increasing recognition of the need to focus on professional development and self-review opportunities available to staff (Simones, 2017; Uptis & Brook, 2017; Williamson et al., 2019; Yeh, 2018). Attention has also been drawn to the high cost of supporting the applied studio model in public and private institutions, the extent to which established pedagogical methods underpin and guide the activities that occur in lessons, and the means by which to assess the outcomes of this format for learning. At the present time, calls continue for the need to investigate the applied studio from a scholarship and research perspective (Blackwell, 2020; Burwell, 2019; Parkes & Daniel, 2023).

The Editors of this text have been researching the applied studio for over ten years, with findings published in a range of scholarly journals and texts. These studies add to the existing body of excellent work undertaken by a significant and increasing number of research scholars, all of whom have a desire to explore the intricacies of what to some extent

can be seen as a ‘secret island’ teaching model, which occurs behind closed doors and with limited scrutiny, particularly when it comes to tertiary-level courses and institutions that invest significant resources in what is a high-cost teaching model. The authors have studied and published across the following broad thematic areas:

- **Influences on applied music studio teachers** (Daniel & Parkes, 2017);
- **Teacher-student behaviors and interactions** (Daniel & Parkes, 2019);
- **Video analysis of lessons** (Parkes & Daniel, 2023);
- **Teacher motivation and identity** (Parkes & Daniel, 2013; Parkes et al., 2015);
- **Assessment in the applied music studio** (Daniel & Parkes, 2015); and
- **Professional development for applied music studio teachers** (Parkes & Daniel, 2016).

Critical lenses and theoretical frameworks that the authors have applied include the principles of learner-centred teaching (e.g. Weimer, 2002), constructivism (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978), self and peer assessment (e.g. Boud, 1995), reflection (e.g. Schön, 1987; Schön, 2016) and researcher-teacher collaboration (e.g. Hultberg, 2005). This chapter proceeds to provide insights into the above research and scholarship and identified themes, and to present a picture as to the authors’ views on the current state of play with regards to the applied studio model at the tertiary level, including areas that are in critical need of further research, and opportunities that exist for the sector.

Influences on Applied Music Studio Teachers

In our 2017 study (Daniel & Parkes, 2017), we gathered survey data from 54 studio teachers in Australia ($n = 25$, 46%), the USA ($n = 22$, 41%), Thailand ($n = 4$, 8%), New Zealand ($n = 2$, 4%) and Korea ($n = 1$, 2%). The teachers who responded worked across the range of instruments, including keyboard, brass, woodwind, strings, percussion and voice. We asked the teachers to reflect on what they believe to be the key influences on how they

teach in the applied studio. Adopting a scale of 1–10, with 1 the strongest influence, we presented teachers with a number of possible options as key influences as well as an opportunity to add ‘other’ options. Overall, we found—and in order of strongest to least strongest—the following order of influences: previous teachers, a particular teacher, learning from bad experiences, education/pedagogy training, learning by doing, professional development, observing colleagues and other (reading, research, experience). Hence, the findings of this particular study reveal the cyclical nature of the applied studio, in that teachers generally teach how they were taught, therefore pointing to the critical importance of ensuring that the lived experience of applied lessons for students is as beneficial and transformative as possible, given the strong likelihood that students will become teachers themselves at some point in their career.

Teacher-Student Behaviors and Interactions

In our 2019 study (Daniel & Parkes, 2019), and with the work of Weimer (2002) as the critical analytical lens, we focussed on questions we asked of the same group of pedagogues cited above (Daniel & Parkes, 2017) in terms of their reflecting on a teaching activity or strategy that exemplifies their approach, to reflect on their general approach to pedagogy, and their perceptions of what makes a successful studio teacher. The group of 54 respondents were firstly grouped into those with pedagogical training (28), and those without (26), as it became noticeable that these two groups presented slightly different data sets. Following a process of coding using NVivo, we were able to identify that those with pedagogical training had a slightly higher frequency of learner-centred teaching strategies and goals, including a greater focus on feedback and assessment, and with reference to the importance of research in their teaching preparation and work in the studio. A significant additional finding was that those with training in pedagogy presented more reflective statements relating to the principles of learner-centred teaching than those without any

training. The findings, while limited to a small sample of teachers, did propose that teachers with pedagogical training do offer a more student-centred approach in the studio than those without training.

Video Analysis of Lessons

In our 2023 study, and building on the earlier work of Hultberg (2005), we worked in real time with three pedagogues in reviewing video excerpts of them teaching in the applied music studio. The individual pedagogues chose the relevant video material to review and were free to talk openly about their pedagogical goals and strategies. One was an experienced trumpet teacher (one lesson reviewed), the other two relatively inexperienced vocal teachers (two lessons each reviewed). All lesson excerpts reviewed were in the traditional applied music studio model. Adopting the theoretical and reflective framework of Schön (2016), we engaged in researcher-teacher discussions relevant to excerpts in lessons, pausing the footage at times and having in-depth reflective conversations at the end of the process. The relevant session and discussion would generally run for an hour.

We found that there were differences between the very experienced trumpet teacher compared to the more novice voice teachers, in terms of confidence and comfortability in approach. We also found that the two novice voice teachers found significant value in reviewing both of their chosen lessons, the process enabling them to reflect on their revised teaching strategies following the first video analysis, and how it enabled them to improve their practice. Overall, we found that this process of researcher-teacher reflective analytical approach in real time would be particularly valuable for novice teachers, assisting them to gain further confidence in their practice, and to experiment with teaching strategies designed to enhance student learning.

Teacher Motivation and Identity

In our 2013 paper, we explored the reasons why highly trained classical musicians move into teaching in the applied music studio, adopting the six motivational constructs from the expectancy-value framework (expectancy, ability, intrinsic interest, attainment, utility and cost) (Eccles et al., 1983). Survey data obtained from 173 pedagogues from nine countries was analysed statistically and qualitatively. Key demographic details are as follows:

5.6% were in Finland, 6.3% in South Africa, 8.1% in Denmark, 9.4% in New Zealand, 9.4% in Sweden, 12.5% in Norway, 13.1% in England, 16.3% in the USA and 19.4% in Australia. Of these, 57.5% were male, and most of them were White/Caucasian (91.3%) Additionally, 0.6% were Hispanic, 0.6% were American Indian, 5% described themselves as 'other' and 2.5% chose not to respond to this question. While some respondents chose not to complete every question, on average there were at least 160 responses as data for analysis (Parkes & Daniel, 2013, p. 400).

When looking specifically at the six motivational constructs, we found that the cost of teaching and performing predicts satisfaction in these areas, that is, participants seemed comfortable with the teaching and performing choices they had made. An additional finding was that those with high intrinsic interest values were more persistent and motivated to teach. The findings enabled us to surmise that the teachers in the sample would continue to be motivated to teach because they found it worthwhile and important.

When reflecting on their time as a higher education music student, approximately half indicated that they were thinking about teaching as a form of paid work. Some of the qualitative comments also indicated that there was a perception that moving into a teaching career or profile was to some extent a failure and lack of success as a performing musician. Others had been teaching for some years and were very comfortable working in this area alongside their performance work. In terms of specific factors motivating these musicians to

move into teaching, the main influences were inspiring teachers, the desire to share knowledge with students, and invitations to teach at the tertiary level. In summary, we found that higher education music instrument teachers are very motivated and committed to teaching and their craft, most students who study music at the tertiary level will at some point become teachers, and that institutions should consider how they prepare high-level performers for working as studio teachers.

In our 2015 paper, which interrogated another part of the data set from the same sample of teachers identified above, we investigated how applied studio teachers understood, categorized, and reflected on their identification as a studio music teacher. We asked the teachers to consider how they identify themselves, as a teacher, performer or both. The findings revealed that the teachers held two identities as both teachers and performers, they felt slightly more talented at teaching, but that they were more satisfied with performing than with teaching. Just over half of the sample chose to identify as performer and teacher (56.1%), rather than performer (23.4%) or teacher identity (20.5%). Our study did not reflect general views in the literature that teacher and performer identity develop separately, rather we found that they develop simultaneously and interchangeably over time. We also determined from the data that there was significant reference to the nexus between performing and teaching for these participants, and that positive identification with teaching is a likely predictor of an ongoing career in the area.

Assessment in the Applied Music Studio

In our 2015 chapter, we raised questions about the nature of assessment in the applied music studio lesson, and how it is traditionally assessment *of* learning (Scott, 2012), with students playing a largely passive role. We referred to how research in terms of assessment in the applied music studio is limited in comparison to research about assessment in music education more broadly and classroom learning in particular. We also referred to the potential

of the significant power differential to cause harm to students' sense of self and their learning, a view generally supported in the literature (Collens & Creech, 2013). We also reflected on what the role of the music expert should be in the applied studio environment, and particularly at the higher education and advanced level, where students would have already formed strong performance and practice methods.

Using the body of data from 173 teachers cited above (Parkes & Daniel, 2013), we looked at teacher responses to questions about their learning, for any references to assessment and feedback. The data pointed to teacher feedback about students' early talent and potential, for setting high standards and expectations for students, and for teacher interest in providing feedback to students on their general development as a musician and performer. However, we identified that in general, there was a lack of systematic and structured forms of assessment and feedback being applied and adopted within the studio by this group of teachers. We then proposed a framework for assessment for learning in the applied music studio, and which involved several facets and methods. This model focussed on reflection as the centre and core of the learning journey for students (Schön, 1987), and in three ways: reflection *to* action, *in* action and *on* action. Aligned to this focus on reflection were four key areas or points of reference for students:

- **Public knowledge:** experts, peers, recordings, research, performances
- **Personal knowledge:** skills, attributes, creativity
- **Professional practice:** practising, recording, collaborating, performing
- **World view:** morals, attitudes, values

We argued that shifting the focus from the teacher as master and primary provider of feedback, this model would place the student as a director of their own learning, and to source feedback and assessment in a variety of both direct and indirect ways. It does not negate the critical importance of the teacher, but it spreads the responsibility for the provision

of feedback and assessment, and in doing so places greater emphasis on the student to identify and reflect on what means and methods are most useful to them as the progress in their journey towards expertise on an instrument or in voice. It also provides the options for the institution to review their assessment methods within curriculum, and consider shifting the emphasis from high-stakes performance exams to a more diverse set of assessment items, such as a portfolio of learning which includes many different forms of assessment and feedback.

Professional Development for Applied Music Studio Teachers

The context for this 2016 paper was the traditions for high-level performers to be recruited to teach in the applied studio in higher education, and regardless of whether these individuals had training in applied music studio pedagogies. Further, the applied studio can not only be somewhat isolating for students, but also for teachers, with collective means of learning with peers relatively rare. Research in terms of professional development in the broad field of Education is considerable, however in relation to the applied studio it is far less common. Using a subset of data from the 2017 survey completed by 54 pedagogues (cited above), we asked applied teachers to reflect on their experiences of and reflections on professional development opportunities relevant to working in the studio, including views on what teachers found valuable for their progression as a teacher.

Key findings included the fact that 63% of the respondents had not had any formal program of professional development. For those that had experienced or undertaken professional development, this ranged from informal methods such as discussions with peers, peer observation, informal meetings, through to more formal programs such as pedagogy events and conferences, in-house workshops, or courses in education. Those that had experienced or engaged with methods of professional development referred to benefits including growth in their teaching methods and ideas, a greater sense of collegiality and

knowledge of wider practice, maintaining currency of knowledge, networking with peers, and benchmarking their practice.

In terms of preferred forms of future professional development, respondents ranked lessons with great teachers most highly, followed by such activities as lesson planning skills, pedagogy methods and engaging with their peers. The findings also have implications for leaders of institutions and department heads (e.g. head of piano or strings) in terms of how they institute procedures for professional development for their full-time and casual applied music studio teachers, given it would appear it is not a standard part of the procedures in higher education music institutions. It also requires a commitment on the behalf of applied studio teachers to engage with professional development in a positive and ongoing manner.

Discussion and Conclusions

The applied studio model for learning a music instrument or in voice will continue to be a cornerstone of music education in both private and public institutions. When delivered and engaged with effectively, it can be a transformational mode of teaching, inspiring generations of musicians who seek to enjoy music or to pursue it as a career. The editors of this text have gathered a significant body of data over a ten-year period and investigated the applied studio from a range of perspectives. These investigations have led to the establishment of a number of general principles in relation to this mode of learning and teaching:

- Applied music studio teachers tend to teach how they were taught, and via the influence of both excellent teachers and those that were not seen as influential or that did not offer significant value to them;
- The master-apprentice history and tradition remains strong and prevalent in current approaches to applied music studio teaching;

- At the higher education level, applied music studio teachers tend to be recruited on the basis of their profile and skills as a performer, more so than their training and understanding of pedagogies appropriate to the studio environment;
- Teachers as ‘masters’ tend to dominate the activities, interactions and discussions in the lesson, although there is some evidence to suggest that those with some pedagogical training experience do have a more learner-centred approach;
- Moving from a performance focus to include teaching offers some transition challenges for applied music studio teachers in terms of identity and motivation;
- Professional development opportunities for applied studio teachers in higher education in particular are relatively rare, and are often driven by the individual, more so than as a result of an institution’s policy and staff development frameworks;
- Situated recall through collaborative researcher-teacher engagement offers benefits for teachers, particularly those in the early stage of their career working in the applied music studio;
- There is a great need for further rigorous and evidence-based research, given the very high cost of applied music studio teaching, the research evidence in support of other means of learning (e.g. self and peer assessment, small group work), and the potential to rethink the frameworks put in place within a student’s study journey; and
- There is a demonstrated need to consider the ways in which higher education institutions might support studio teachers to develop their practice in both collaborative and non-judgmental ways.

The researchers and editors of this text see great opportunities for leaders of music institutions that offer applied studio teaching to play a stronger role in supporting, fostering, scrutinising and evaluating the model, in order that the outcomes for students can be even more beneficial. This research and scrutiny will also offer those outside institutions such as

private studio teachers the opportunity to learn from the work being undertaken in the larger institutions. While arguments will remain that the master-apprentice nature of the applied studio model is entrenched in history and remains relevant in the 21st century, as is the case with all modes of learning and teaching, there is room for the applied music studio environment to develop further and towards stronger student outcomes.

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