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# Fixing contradictions between the NSW Draft 7-10 Music Syllabus and NESA's own Evidence Base

A report with contributions from Andrea Calilhanna, Dr Thomas Fienberg, Brad Fuller, Dr James Humberstone FRSA, Angelina Nguyen, Peter Orenstein, Caitlin Sandiford, and David Tocknell.

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# Introduction

A draft of the new NSW Syllabus for Music in years 7-10 was published publicly in August 2022. A short window of a matter of weeks was given for the “have your say” period. A number of concerned teachers and academics noted a regression in the syllabus from culturally inclusive music education, and (back) towards aesthetic music education of the 1950s-1980s (Reimer, 1970): improvements that had been made in the 1995 and 2003 NSW syllabi. At the same time, the draft syllabus included an evidence base by New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) that directly contradicted these regressive changes.

NESA’s evidence base, published in the draft syllabus, while not perfect nor up-to-date, is an excellent recognition of the philosophical and research underpinnings of the current syllabus (2003).

Teachers and researchers also noted that the draft included prescriptive lists of content-to-be-taught, in line with current NESA policy for standardisation of syllabi, which were in direct contradiction to both NESA’s Evidence base and the syllabus directions for differentiation. We confirmed this by meeting with the (only) NESA Music Subject Matter Expert. Since musical knowledge is culturally situated (Dunbar-Hall, 2005; Elliott, 2005; Regelski, 2005 - all cited in the Evidence Base), the monocultural manner in which so many of the prescriptive points were written again contradicted NESA’s own Evidence Base.

We triangulated our own analysis by writing to three of the most esteemed authors in NESA’s Evidence Base, Distinguished Teaching Professor of Music (Emeritus) Professor Thomas Regelski (State University of New York at Fredonia), Emeritus Professor David Elliott (New York University), and Honorary Associate Professor Peter Dunbar-Hall (Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of Sydney). Each expert confirmed in strong words that the content of the syllabus, especially the Stage 5 content, was not consistent with their research as cited in the NESA Evidence Base. Their correspondence is included in a section below, and they gave permission for it to be shared with NESA, with the teaching profession, and publicly.

To respond to these inherent problems, we formed a group to (a) (re-)read the Evidence Base and then (b) propose changes to the draft syllabus that would resolve the contradictions. We took the approach of rewriting rather than only providing a commentary because the NESA Music Subject Matter Expert said that this would be most useful.

# Key Recommendations

Having reviewed the Evidence Base and actively sought to apply it to the draft syllabus, the arising key recommendations from our group are:

1. Remove all monocultural and limiting musical language
  - a. Remove the axiomatic mandating of one musical culture (Western Art Music) above all others in Stage 5
2. Use language for the Learning Experiences and Content lists that is culturally inclusive.
  - a. The biggest change that we are suggesting is that the 1995 and 2003 labels for the learning experiences, Performing, Composing, and Listening can be made more inclusive of all musical cultures by renaming them Playing (and Singing), Creating, and Listening.<sup>1</sup>
3. If examples are to be footnoted from Content lists, engage experts in contemporary and culturally diverse musics. Alternatively, keep examples for supporting documentation, which can be written by experts later.
4. Make the Outcomes consistent with the aim to embed the Concepts of Music by embedding them in Content lists rather than in assessment (consistent with the praxial section of NESA's Evidence Base as well as the stated aim on page 8).
5. Make the use of Topics in Stage 5 consistent with NESA's Evidence Base on differentiation and constructivism by allowing teachers to devise topics/contexts as has been done in Stage 4.
6. Extend the timeframe of syllabus development to allow for more careful and informed writing, and a second round of public feedback.
  - a. Commit to regular minor reviews similar to other states and territories in Australia, of around 4 years.

In addition, while the focus of this document is to identify and remedy the contradictions between NESA's Evidence Base and the draft syllabus, we would also recommend:

1. The Evidence Base is updated to include the latest research in the field (see the following notes), and
2. The Evidence Base is updated to include the most impactful research and practice in the areas of Informal Learning and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

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<sup>1</sup> We have included our reasoning in the syllabus comments and in a section below.

# Limitations of this work

## Resolving contradictions, not developing from scratch

While we, as a group, have invested significant time reviewing the NESAs Evidence Base and attempting to resolve the inherent contradictions in the draft syllabus, the timeline for the “have your say” period has been very short, at the busiest (HSC period) time of the year for music teachers, and certainly not enough time for all of the nuance in the literature to find its way into our edited version. As we submit this document, we are still having robust and enlightening discussions around the literature, and more recent research publications in the field by the same authors cited in NESAs Evidence Base. The many contradictions in the draft syllabus are probably evidence that (a) the writing was rushed and (b) the writing team, NESAs leadership, and advisory groups were not diverse enough, especially in musical expertise outside the one narrow field mostly represented.

Therefore, the following edited version of the syllabus is very much a work in progress, and we would be delighted if NESAs invited us, or a similar team of expert teachers and researchers, to continue and complete this work, as part of an ongoing new process of syllabus review (as happens in other states and territories).

One limitation of taking the approach of fixing mistakes (contradictions) in the draft syllabus, is that we have not been able to start afresh and imagine what a truly innovative and world-leading syllabus for music in these age groups might look like in 2022, drawing on *all* the research and existing models internationally. All teachers and researchers involved in our group pointed to the advances in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP, sometimes referred to as Culturally Responsive Teaching, CRT) and how these have been well implemented in curricula worldwide, including here in NSW by the Department of Education and other education bodies.<sup>2</sup> As a group we felt that a fresh approach to the syllabus would have been to incorporate CRP to all stages of music learning, and that this would be a natural progression from the praxial (Elliott, 2005; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Regelski, 2005; Regelski, 2021) and multicultural (Dunbar-Hall, 2005) approach taken in the current NESAs Evidence Base. With a CRP approach, there is no way that the current problems in the draft syllabus with monoculturally limiting content and examples would have arisen. The New Zealand music curriculum and supporting documents have already done this well.<sup>3</sup>

In taking a fresh approach, we agreed that we would have wanted to acknowledge the Evidence Base that informed the 2003 syllabus, which is essentially what NESAs have done, but we would also have wanted to (a) focus on more recent updates to this field of research, and (b) focus on the impacts of the biggest new research fields developed since the 2003 syllabus. We outline these in the next section.

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<sup>2</sup> NSW Department of Education, *Strong Strides Together*

[https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/aec/media/documents/Strong\\_strides\\_together.pdf](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/aec/media/documents/Strong_strides_together.pdf); The Menzies Centre for Child Development and Education, *Cultural Responsiveness and School Education* [https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms\\_docs/312407\\_Cultural\\_Responsiveness\\_and\\_School\\_Education.pdf](https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/312407_Cultural_Responsiveness_and_School_Education.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> We were advised by NZ teacher, scholar and DJ, Martin Emo.

<https://ncea.education.govt.nz/arts/music?view=learning>;

<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum/The-arts/Achievement-objectives#collapsible3>

## Missing from NESA's Evidence Base

More up-to-date research by the same authors as those cited in the evidence base

As mentioned earlier, we were able to triangulate our conclusion that there were many contradictions between the NESA Evidence Base and the syllabus content by speaking to three of the authors cited in the Evidence Base, Emeritus Professor Thomas Regelski, Emeritus Professor David Elliott, and Honorary Associate Professor Peter Dunbar-Hall. These authors also suggested that work they have done since the texts they are cited for would provide more up-to-date research on which to base the new syllabus. They recommended, and sent us copies of:

Regelski, T. A. (2021). *Curriculum Philosophy and Theory for Music Education Praxis*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197558690.001.0001>

van der Schyff, D., Schiavio, A., & Elliott, D. J. (2022). *Musical Bodies, Musical Minds. Enactive Cognitive Science and the Meaning of Human Musicality*. The MIT Press.

Professor Regelski also sent us the draft of his next book, *Music is What it Does: Praxis Redux*.

We also note that the syllabus cited the 1995 first edition of Elliott's *Music Matters*. The second edition was published in 2015, co-authored with Marissa Silverman, and is one of the fundamental texts of music education today:

Elliott, D. J., & Silverman, M. (2015). *Music Matters. A philosophy of music education* (Second Edition). Oxford University Press.

## Other important research of the past 20 years

### Cultural Diversity in Music Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The inclusion of the Dunbar-Hall (2005) citation reflects the excellent work done in multicultural music education in NSW and Australia in the latter part of the 20th Century, and the first decade of the 21st. During the last two decades, the field of Cultural Diversity in Music Education has grown internationally, with many Australian researchers contributing to this field of scholarship. The Sydney Conservatorium of Music has a long-standing course dedicated to this in its Music Education degree. As introduced on the last page, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) has been a core pedagogy explored in the Cultural Diversity field. Members of the group working on this project recommended as essential reading:

Abril, C. R. (2013). Toward a More Culturally Responsive General Music Classroom. *General Music Today*, 27(1), 6–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1048371313478946>

Campbell, P. S., Drummond, J., Dunbar-Hall, P., Howard, K., Schippers, H., & Wiggins, T. (2005). *Cultural Diversity in Music Education*. Australian Academic Press.

Campbell, P. S., & Wiggins, T. (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Musical Cultures*. Oxford University Press.



Howard, K. & Kelley, J. (2018). *World Music Pedagogy, Volume III: Secondary School Innovations*. Taylor and Francis.

Lind, V. R. (2016). *Culturally responsive teaching in music education: From understanding to application* (C. L. McKoy, Ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315747279>

Locke, T., & Prentice, L. (2016). Facing the Indigenous “Other”: Culturally Responsive Research and Pedagogy in Music Education. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 45(2), 139–151. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2016.1>

Webb, M., & Bracknell, C. (2021). Educative Power and the Respectful Curricular Inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music. In A. A. Kallio, H. Westerlund, S. Karlsen, K. Marsh, & E. Sæther (Eds.), *The Politics of Diversity in Music Education* (pp. 71–86). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65617-1\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65617-1_6)

## Informal Learning

The single biggest influence on contemporary music education practices in the last two decades has been the Informal Learning movement which was inspired by Professor Lucy Green’s (University College London) two seminal books:

Green, L. (2002). *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education*. Ashgate.

Green, L. (2008). *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*. Ashgate.

Green’s Informal Learning pedagogy was popularised in the UK, Canada, and Australia by the *Musical Futures* organisation, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. They disseminated Green’s core pedagogical ideas, drawn from her research on how popular musicians learn, namely: choosing music young people are already culturally invested in, learning by ear, learning in friendship groups, and a change in the role of the teacher from instructor to facilitator. In Green’s own words, “Playing music of one’s own choice, with which one identifies personally, operating both as a performer and a composer with like-minded friends, and having fun doing it must be high priorities in the quest for increasing numbers of young people to benefit from a music education which makes music not merely available, but meaningful, worthwhile, and participatory” (2008, p. 229).

More importantly than *Musical Futures*’ role in the dissemination of Informal Learning approaches in music education internationally, however, is the tight research-practice nexus that has been ongoing since. Both music teachers and researchers have trialled, critiqued, and expanded Green’s initial pedagogy, and this work is ongoing here in NSW as well as around the world. To not include and draw upon this research and practice is to remain willfully ignorant of the very latest and most impactful work in music education. Key texts exploring Informal Learning in different contexts since Green’s seminal books include:

Hallam, S., Creech, A., & McQueen, H. (2018). Pupils’ perceptions of informal learning in school music lessons. *Music Education Research*, 20(2), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2016.1249358>

- Hallam, S., Creech, A., & McQueen, H. (2017). Can the adoption of informal approaches to learning music in school music lessons promote musical progression? *British Journal of Music Education*, 34(2), 127–151. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051716000486>
- Hess, J. (2020). *Finding the “both/and”*: Balancing informal and formal music learning. *International Journal of Music Education*, 38(3), 441–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761420917226>
- Karlsen, S., & Väkevä, L. (2012). *Future Prospects for Music Education: Corroborating Informal Learning Pedagogy*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Moir, Z., Powell, B., & Smith, G. D. (2019). *The Bloomsbury handbook of popular music education: Perspectives and practices*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Wright, R., Younker, B. A., & Beynon, C. (2016). *21st Century Music Education. Informal learning and non-formal teaching approaches in school and community contexts*. CMEA/ACME National Office.

# What is in the NESAs Evidence Base cited?

## On praxialism

The most comprehensive overview of praxial music education in the evidence base comes from Regelski, writing in Elliott (2005). According to Regelski, praxial music education theory:

- accounts for all kinds and uses of music and finds musical value in the constitutive sociality of music and the functional importance of music for the human processes that govern social and thus individual consciousness
- holds no musical praxis as more or less important than other kinds of musical “doing”
- redresses the imbalance the aesthetic orthodoxy has promulgated on behalf of listening and particularly reasserts the importance of musical agency through various kinds of amateur performance
- accounts for and points to the “good time” that results from listening or performing — time that is deemed as “worthwhile” in relation to both its sociality and its individuating benefits and other meanings, benefits, and uses
- maintains that the “good time” resulting from musical praxis engages a variety of socially structured meanings in which the individual participates in a way that is nonetheless self-defining and self-enhancing
- provides support for all kinds of amateur and recreational uses of music as their own valid and valuable praxis which have a proper place and personal, social, and thus musical value; and in general argues that these kinds of praxis need to be regarded and valued as such, including in decisions concerning curriculum
- views music as fully integrated in, intrinsic to and defining of the nature and value-structure of social practices such as religious ceremonies, weddings, ceremonies, and the like, intrinsic to and defining of their very nature and value-structure where, at the same time, the sociality entailed is intrinsic to and defining of the music and its meaning and value
- views music as not only for experts or an elite few connoisseurs; it is also of and for the down-to-earth conditions of everyday life and life well lived in terms of the “good time” thus created
- maintains that music’s meaning and value are in and for personal agency, and such personal agency constructs an infinite variety of meanings from the same musical affordances according to personal and other situated conditions. Consequently, music is altogether more engaged with everyday people and everyday life than is allowed by the aesthetic orthodoxy and, thus, by music education as aesthetic education.
- which includes all kinds of musicking is altogether more down to earth as a foundation for the decisions guiding curriculum for music education (in Elliott, 2005, pp. 234-235).

## On multicultural music education

The praxial literature cited in the NESAs Evidence Base acts, on its own, as a strong underpinning for inclusive and multicultural music education: Elliott and Silverman remind us that “praxial music education

means that we should endeavor, to the best of our abilities, to teach and empower students to learn all forms of music making and listening” (2015, p. 43).

In addition to the praxial texts, the NESAs Evidence Base cites Dunbar-Hall’s seminal 2005 paper, *Colliding Perspectives? Music Curriculum as Cultural Studies*. In this paper, Dunbar-Hall introduces the key ideas of pluralism in music education, music curriculum as cultural studies, and the common pitfalls of teachers when they try to teach non-Western musics through a Western lens: “breaking down this music into the concepts used to analyze Western music robs it of the holistic approach that indigenous musicians adopt - an approach in which pitch cannot be separated from the words of a song, the rhythms of the music, the dance it accompanies, the story it describes, or the places where it can be performed. A form of cultural imperialism is the result.” (p. 35). Dunbar-Hall criticises the centering of the Concepts of Music (central to all Stages of the NSW Music syllabi) as a way of studying non-Western music, which is why the move to state that the Concepts should be “embedded in the *Working musically* and *Contexts of music* content groups” (p. 8) rather than taught explicitly in the draft syllabus is indeed a step forward.

Dunbar-Hall was instrumental in the burgeoning of the related field of Cultural Diversity in Music Education in the first decade of this century. In addition to the paper cited, in the same year, he and a number of other Australian researchers including Kathryn Marsh, Melissa Cain, Scott Harrison, Steve Dillon, and Jim Chapman contributed to the publication of *Cultural diversity in music education. Directions and challenges for the 21st century* (2005), edited by Patricia Shehan Campbell and Huib Schippers. This landmark publication set out the history of the field and accounts for some of the best practices internationally, including many examples from Australia. Since its publication, Australian teachers and researchers have continued to contribute to international biannual conferences and research publications, highlighting much of the great work done in cultural diversity in Australia.

One of the key criticisms of researchers and practitioners in the field of Cultural Diversity in Music Education is the same criticism that Dunbar-Hall made in his 2005 paper, cited in the NESAs Evidence Base: that “it is quite common to find schools and tertiary institutions providing education only in western classical music, or allowing multicultural elements but privileging the European tradition” (Drummond, in Campbell & Schippers, 2005, p. 1), a criticism we make of this very draft syllabus below.

In that chapter Drummond goes on to account for the justifications for multicultural and culturally diverse music education, drawn from the research literature:

- We live in a culturally plural world
- Removal of disadvantage
- The majority can learn from the minority (pp. 2-3)

# Where does the content of the Syllabus contradict the evidence base?

## Praxial Music Education

Since their cited 2005 papers, Regelski and Elliott have collectively published over one hundred books and journal articles expanding and updating their praxial music education philosophy. This work has, in turn, generated a massive body of literature challenging and promoting the affordances, applicability, and suitability of the praxial music education philosophy for classroom music education. This work has not been cited as evidence in the draft syllabus. Had the draft syllabus authors consulted the most recent writing on praxial music education and conducted a more careful reading of the 2005 works, it is likely that many of the contradictions between the cited evidence base and the draft syllabus might have been avoided. As it stands, there are several incongruences which are addressed below.

## Active Participation vs Praxial Music Education

Regelski (2005) and Elliott (2005) are cited to support a definition of music as “a matter of action” with “people being active participants in the process” who should “engage directly with music rather than being ‘taught about it’” (p. 5). While the retention of direct engagement from the current (2003) syllabus is encouraging, it misrepresents Regelski and Elliott’s similar, and largely complementary, descriptions of praxial music education as “action” by removing its crucial “ethical dimension” (Regelski, 2005, p. 16). Regelski says that “by definition, praxis involves tangible ‘doing’ that ‘makes a difference’ of some kind for the individuals or groups served”, and that praxis is “governed by an ethical dimension (called phronesis) where ‘right results’ are judged specifically in terms of the people served or affected [and] the ‘rightness’ of results thus varies according to the situated needs in question” (p. 16).

## Praxial Music Education and Teachers

Regelski (2005) provides a guide to help teachers act ethically towards their students where “right results” are “judged in terms of the beneficial difference made for those served, not in abstract apriori, metaphysical, or strictly technical terms” (p. 19). He says that due to the “inherent sociality and pluralism of musics, and the complex interaction between them, the idea of a single model of ‘music appreciation’ is simply out of the question, as is the sacralization of music” (p. 18). But the draft syllabus is full of mandatory “abstract apriori, metaphysical” and “strictly technical terms” (p. 19) such as “Contexts of music for Stage 5” (NESA, 2022, p. 20) with its mandatory list of topics and the sacralization of the compulsory Western Art Music topic.

A syllabus based on Regelski (2005) would restore the ethical dimension of praxial music education for teachers by acknowledging that they are best placed to “know their students” (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, p. 10) and it would direct them to choose contexts that will make a “difference” in the lives of their students, “now and in the future” (Regelski, 2005, p. 20). Teachers would be reminded that students “come to school each day already enculturated into a deep appreciation of music

as praxis and they would select contexts to ‘build on the music backgrounds of students’ and ‘options provided by the local music world’” (p. 20) rather than trying to “redeem” them “from their existing musical dispositions and practices” by “‘converting’ them to models of connoisseurship that are so alien as to be alienating” (p. 22). Taking a praxial approach to selecting contexts, as suggested by Regelski, the syllabus would not mandate Western Art Music as the “paragon of quality for all music” but would instead list it as “one type of music—a particular praxis valued by a small fraction of people” (p. 18).

In freely choosing contexts for and with their students from all of the musics available rather than a short, colonised list, teachers would be guided by a “professional ethic for right results” where music would be judged as “good” according to what it is “good for” (p.18). They would be guided to first “do no harm” to students by providing opportunities for musicking in contexts that, rather than excludes or alienates, “adds value” to their lives (p. 19) as they are “newly or better able to ‘do’ music as the result of instruction” through an “increasing wealth of skills and options for musicking”, which provide the “bases for continuing experience” (p. 21), and “enriches” [their] musical options and thus enhances the likelihood that music will ‘make a difference’ in their lives” and “enliven society”. In short, students “should not be ‘turned off’ by instruction, criticism, competition, and drill; instead, they should be ‘turned on’ to music” (p. 22).

## Praxial Music Education and Students

The draft syllabus writers, in focusing on action, have omitted key ethical and creative dimensions of the praxial approach which has a direct and detrimental impact on the educative musical opportunities for students. Elliott and Silverman remind us that:

To Aristotle, praxis means active reflection and reflective action for the positive transformation of people’s everyday lives and situations. So when people translate praxis simplistically as “to do” or “to make” they are misunderstanding the concept. This translation overlooks many key dimensions of this concept. And when music educators claim praxial music education simply means “doing” in the sense of musical performing alone, or teaching performing alone, they’re wrong. (2015, p. 43)

The draft syllabus lacks this sense of active reflection and reflective action by learners (and teachers). In the praxial approach, this critical reflection is guided by ethical concerns and learning to make music *musically* must be “put to work” for “artistic citizenship—the positive transformation of communities”. Furthermore, students are required to develop “practical reasoning”, “the ability to make practical judgments, decisions, and choices based on a fusion of theory and experience in/for specific people in a specific context” (p. 46).

An extension of the ethical focus of musicking in the praxial approach, the empowerment of personhood which includes “shared capacities and dispositions to act justly towards others” should be developed “in-and-through musicking and listening” (p. 52). This is another facet of the praxial approach cited in the evidence base that has been omitted in the draft syllabus.

Finally the draft syllabus places too much emphasis on musical replication rather than on the development of students’ creativity. The praxial approach seeks to “develop students’ musicianship and creativity simultaneously” in “all forms of music making” which “overlaps and extends the process of developing their

musicianship. Creativity needs to be re-centered and reintegrated into the learning experiences in the draft syllabus (p. 334).

## Praxial Music Education and Understanding

The current (2003) syllabus often refers to students' "understanding" along with "skills" and "knowledge", but references to "understanding" have been reduced in the draft syllabus. This is in contradiction to the praxial approach cited in the evidence base.

Praxial music education adopts the "social constructivist" use of the word understanding as "enabling people to develop, co-construct, and apply particular kinds of knowing-doing". Understanding is also "tied to empathy, as in being an "understanding person who is sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, difficulties, needs, and desires" of others. A syllabus that sought to promote "educative and compassionate" teaching and learning would show more evidence of being concerned with how students "feel about how they're learning to make and listen to music, how they feel about and respond to what we're doing as educators, how others in their learning community respond to them, or not, and how we can improve students' experiences in these regards". If the draft syllabus had a praxial, intersubjective view of understanding rather than a "purely objective, knowledge-focused lens", it would encourage teachers to teach music more "musically, effectively, and meaningfully". Unfortunately, the draft syllabus, when it does mention understanding, equates it with "some version of musical understanding that equals musical skills and concepts". Elliott and Silverman trace this thinking "back to Descartes' mind-body dualism" and advise that "music educators should dump this old way of thinking once and for all". (Elliott and Silverman, 2015, p. 202)

## Praxial Music Education and Curriculum Making

Writing in the cited *Praxial music education: Reflections and dialogues* (Elliott, 2005), Regelski summarises Elliott's praxial approach to curriculum making in the cited *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (1995):

[Elliott's] critique of the abstract, atomistic content and isolated skills of the conventional objectives-oriented and structure-of-the discipline approaches to music curriculum drew upon and thus reflected the most recent trends in curriculum theory in the early 1990s. He also advanced a provocative and incisive theory of curriculum- as-practicum, designed and organised "to engage learners in musical actions, transactions, and interactions that closely parallel real music cultures" and making, in consequence, "the music classroom . . . a reflective musical practicum, a close representation of viable music-practice situations, or music cultures" (p. 219).

However, the draft syllabus more closely resembles the orthodox approach of which Elliott was deeply critical. Consider this description in light of the draft syllabus:

While the aesthetic orthodoxy allows popular, folk, improvisatory, and similar kinds of lay, indigenous, and functional musics to be called "music," a strict hierarchy is maintained, with the Eurocentric art music canon at the very top and other musics variously arrayed on a descending continuum beneath (p. 221).

And:

Perennialists argue that schooling should be uniform since human nature is uniform in being, at its best, rational. Therefore, rather than addressing students' individual needs or interests, or their evolving personal and social needs, perennialists believe that uniform and prescribed subject matter should be the focus of the curriculum (p. 226).

Elliott's solution for the 7-10 music syllabus is to "get back to the unique requirements of active music making as they exist in particular conditions of situatedness". He says this "a defining trait of any praxial theory of music and therefore of a praxial orientation to curriculum for music education" (p. 226).

### From the Horses' Mouths

Elliott and Regelski have made direct criticisms of the draft syllabus and we have provided these in full in the correspondence section. David Elliott wrote "the syllabus is organized very much like a Western Classical Music music appreciation text with its heavy emphasis on the elements and forms of 'musical works.' The hidden assumption here is that if/when students can identify/explain the elements and forms of works, then they will enjoy music more because they know (verbally) more about it. There is absolutely no research to support this claim. None. In fact, I believe it's the opposite. No active music making, no joy, no musical growth, etc."

## Contradictions with the NESAs Evidence Base on Multicultural Music Education

Dunbar-Hall (2005) clearly states that the use of Western conceptions of music to teach music it was not designed for "robs it [the music] of the holistic approach that indigenous musicians adopt" and that this leads to "a form of cultural imperialism" (p. 35). While the proposed syllabus does acknowledge that providing context can allow for holistic teaching, this is not supported by the use of the "concepts of music" as a centralised way of understanding all types of music. It is impossible for the syllabus to both claim to be allowing for holistic understandings reflective of real-life musician practice and to make the concepts of music a central part of the syllabus, as shown by their presence in so many Stage 4 and Stage 5 Outcomes. Doing so acts to unintentionally reduce the place of context in understanding music, which is especially important when teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musics, as highlighted in the NESAs Evidence Base by both Dunbar-Hall (2005) and Murphy-Haste (2009).

Furthermore, the language used under the Concepts of Music for both Stage 4 and Stage 5, as well as under all the focus areas for Stage 4 but especially Stage 5, is extremely Eurocentric. This is especially the case in the footnotes, where the opportunity to express diversity could have been taken. An egregious example of this is on p. 29 of the proposed syllabus. As part of *Working Musically* in Listening in Stage 5, students are asked to "apply knowledge of structural elements within musical works using understanding of style". While not the language we would use, the statement is sufficiently broad that with some small modification it can be made applicable across musics. However, the list of examples to be found in the footnotes includes:



“Rondo, theme and variation, sonata, strophic, blues, jazz head arrangement, contemporary music structure, rock music and popular music.

– Multi-movement structures such as concerto, sonata, oratorio, symphony, string quartet, the musical.”

Note that all of the musical structures listed are from Western Art Music (WAM). Music that is considered Western in nature but is not WAM is merely mentioned, with no forms or structures listed. This raises such questions as “What is popular music structure? What is contemporary music structure?”. In terms of music that is not traditionally thought of as “Western”, there is nothing. Such language shows a clear hierarchy of musics in the syllabus which appears deaf to the “Music as Cultural Studies” approach in the NESAs Evidence Base that Dunbar-Hall (2005) is arguing for. We can thus see how a focus on the “Concepts of Music” can lead to Eurocentric language which “serves to privilege Western European ‘fine art’ music in the school music curriculum”, as Elliott warns.

Dunbar-Hall (2005) claims that “music education that centers almost exclusively on Western art music has become a thing of the past” (p. 33); it would be disappointing to see the syllabus regress to a less culturally sensitive and pluralist past. It is hard to claim Dunbar-Hall (2005) as part of the evidence base of the new syllabus when not even the assumptions present within the research (i.e. that music beyond that considered “Western” is being taught) are true within the syllabus, let alone the direct arguments being made.

## Music is a Universal Language?

The draft syllabus states that “Music is a universal language” on pages 10 and 11. This is an antiquated idea that was strongly dismissed in research more than 20 years ago (Campbell, 1997; Letts, 1997; Mukuna, 1997). In terms of further contradictions with the NESAs Evidence Base, Elliott & Silverman (2015) point out that music is not a universal language but instead that “music making occurs as a universal characteristic of *Homo sapiens sapiens*” (p. 75).

## Contradictions On the Aim and Rationale of Music Education

Perhaps the primary reason the draft syllabus is regressive is the incongruence between NESAs Evidence Base and the Aim (p. 11) of and Rationale (p. 10) for music education. Although the draft does not provide in-text citations to facilitate careful interrogation of the claims made, David J. Elliott’s *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (1995) is listed in the reference list. Elliott’s 2005 edited book *Praxial music education: Reflections and dialogues* is also cited as evidence for students engaging directly with music. As discussed, both of these references are odd choices given the existence of Elliott and Silverman’s 2015 second edition of *Music Matters* which benefited from 20 years of peer reviewed criticism. Therefore, Elliott and Silverman (2015) will be used here to interrogate the congruence between their most recently stated aims of praxial music education and the Aims listed in the draft syllabus (p. 11).

## Aim

First, Elliott and Silverman remind us that “the task of music education is not to develop procedural musical knowledge, verbal knowledge, experiential knowledge, and so on as ends in themselves” (2015, p. 380), while the current (2003) syllabus aims to:

provide students with the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary for active engagement and enjoyment in performing, composing and listening, and to allow a range of music to have a continuing role in their lives.

While there is an element of technical reduction to “ends in themselves” evident in the 2003 syllabus aim, there is an acknowledgement, but not necessarily a connection, that music would ideally have a continuing role in the individual’s life, and words like “opportunity” and “allow” suggest a sense of the teacher’s role in facilitating learning. Therefore, the 2003 syllabus Aims are mostly consistent with praxial music education.

In contrast, the new draft syllabus (2022) reduces the aim of the syllabus to four dot points and says:

The study of Music in Years 7–10 enables students to:

- develop a lifelong sense of wonder and curiosity about music as a universal language
- appreciate music as an art form with expressive, cultural and aesthetic value
- experience the creative process as an individual, and in collaboration with others, through composing, listening, appreciating and performing
- develop musical knowledge, skills, and literacies, to become thoughtful and informed musicians.

The language changes from “opportunities” to “enable”, reflecting a change in teacher role from facilitator to “enabler”. “Active engagement and enjoyment” and “a continuing role in their lives” (2003 syllabus) is replaced with passivity. In the draft syllabus, the students are wondering about music as a universal language (an idea, as shown above, that has been dismissed in the literature), passively and unmeasurably appreciating music as an art form, experiencing the creative process, with performing appearing fourth in the list behind appreciating (which again, isn’t measurable). The final Aim removes “understanding”, and, while musical knowledge, skills, and literacies aren’t technically only an end in themselves, they are included in service of “thoughtful” rather than ethical and “informed” critically thinking musicians (Elliott, 1995; Elliott, 2005; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Regelski, 2005; Regelski, 2021).

Not only does this technicist, rationalist recipe fall desperately short of the current (2003) syllabus aim, but when read against the evidence base the case is even weaker. For example, the draft syllabus could have taken up Elliott and Silverman’s (2015) research on Musical Thinkings and Knowings which states:

The primary task of music education is to develop the MTKs [Musical Thinkings and Knowings] of learners through progressive musical problem solving in balanced relation to appropriate musical challenges every step of the way. [...] it’s the balancing or matching of musicianship with carefully selected musical challenges that results in students’ self-growth, enjoyment, and self-knowledge-one of the most important kinds of knowledge human beings can gain. Self-growth, self knowledge and musical enjoyment are the aims of music education overall and the primary goals of every music teaching-learning episode. (p. 381)

They also state that “personal meaningfulness, interconnectedness, social capital, empathy, ethical maturation, self-growth, self-knowledge, and flow are values of MUSICS (sic.) , and therefore aims of music education” (p. 412). Furthermore, they maintain that “to the extent that these aims are achieved, music education will most likely contribute to the development of students' human flourishing and identities, as well as group-communal well-being” and “nurture the sheer love of music and sharing it with like-minded others ... [that] is a principal value in the life well-lived” (p. 412).

If the evidence promotes students' self-growth, enjoyment, and self-knowledge – one of the most important kinds of knowledge human beings can gain – as key aims for music education, why have they not been included in the draft syllabus Aim (p. 11)? Elliott, Silverman, and Regelski have so much more to offer the syllabus writers. They must go back to the evidence they've cited because the poorly researched and poorly presented aim of this syllabus does not serve the students and teachers of New South Wales. The draft syllabus authors have cited Elliott and Regelski. They must jettison these dot point aims, go back to the most recent works by these authors, and develop an evidence based aim for this syllabus which will guide the revision of this draft syllabus.

## Rationale

Regelski (2005) states:

“Speculation about music's aesthetic nobility, profundity, and spirituality is not needed to legitimate its special status in society. Whatever experiences people have in connection with its use, that they use it shows they value those experiences. Thus the wide use of music shows clearly that it is already 'special'. (p. 21)

Perhaps a way forward for the draft syllabus rationale would be to more carefully analyse and adopt a praxial rationale because it emphasise:

(1) that music should be active reflection and critically reflective action dedicated to supporting and advancing human flourishing and well-being, the ethical care of others, and the positive transformation of people's everyday lives; and (2) that each instance of music should be conceived, taught, and learned as a social praxis-as a fusion of people, processes, products, and ethical "goods" in specific social-cultural contexts.

# Why do the Learning Experiences (Listening, Performance, and Composition) need to be renamed?

After lengthy discussion and reference to the NESAs Evidence Base, our group decided that the Learning Experiences should not keep the same labels that they were given in the 1995 and 2003 syllabi because we have much better understanding of music across cultures now.

## Renaming “Performance” (previously “Performing”) as “Playing”

One of our group members wrote:

Thomas Turino's "Music as Social Life" (2008) is a foundation document in Elliott and Silverman's concept of "musicing". It also sits beautifully with Small's "musicking". Turino lists four "fields" - participatory and presentational performance, and high fidelity and studio audio art. Cutting to the chase, I'm uncomfortable with "performing" as a learning experience because it privileges performing - the idea of polishing something for an audience (which often results in miseducative teaching), over participatory - music(k)ing. I think playing is a much broader term that covers what we hope students will do for life - make music with others for the sake of it because it is "good" for self and others, and it can also cover making presentational music for an audience. It's also an authentic term.

It is possible that some teachers may object to this term because the word “playing” is usually applied to instruments, and not singing. If this objection were raised, the Learning Experience could be renamed “Playing and Singing”.

## Renaming “Composition” (previously “Composing”) as “Creating”

Similarly, one of the group members challenged "composing" as an appropriate or inclusive term for broader music-creative acts in 2022, quoting from their own publication:

It seems strange that all of these documents refer to the act of making music up as “composing”. The vision of the “composer”, as projected by posters on classroom walls to this day, is nearly ubiquitously the dead white male (Althouse, Grace, & Wyatt, 2015; McDonald Publishing Company, 2017; Music in motion, 2012; North star teacher resources, 2020), who creates music by writing it down in scores and then having it performed by musicians trained to an elite level in the Euro-centric Western Art Music (WAM) tradition (Bull, 2019).

Australia is “one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse populations in the world” (NSW Government, 2020, para. 1), so it is difficult to generalise about what musical cultures young Australians grow up with and later choose to participate in. Spotify's streaming statistics, at the time of writing (Spotify, 2020), suggest that Australians listen most to various genres of rock, mainstream pop, hip-hop, and only a little country and electronic dance music (EDM). Classical music is not mentioned. Statistics from the Australia Record Industry Association (ARIA) charts

lean toward mainstream pop, with separate charts for hip-hop/RnB, Australian hip-hop/RnB, dance, club, country, Australian country, jazz & blues, and classical (Australian Record Industry Association, 2020); Evershed's (2015) analysis of ARIA's singles charts data from 1988 to 2014 summarises the shifting popularity of the conventional band, electronic, urban, pop music, and "other" genres. Given the rise of hip-hop to become arguably the world's most popular music genre in the last five years (Leight, 2019), an updated analysis might reveal a sixth genre here, too.

While such information provides only a blurry yardstick with which to paint the broadest of brushstrokes about the musical cultures to which young Australians relate, it is entirely clear that those musical worlds are not made up of music written by the archetypal dead white composer-figure, or even a modern day equivalent. Terms used to describe the creation of music within the genres that surround us every day are more likely to be "songwriter" (in fact, Everett (2008) goes to pains to clarify the difference between songwriter and composer), "producer", "deejay" (Sa'id, 2016; Schloss, 2014), or "emcee" (Schloss, 2009).

The nearly exclusive use of the term composer and composition to describe the musical identity and musical action of creating new music, then, is problematic. Problematic at the very least because dead white Europeans are a long way separated from living young Australians. Problematic because if young people do want to make music, they probably want to produce, to song-write, to deejay, or emcee rather than, or at least as well as, compose.

"Creating" is a better term, because it includes the act of composition, as well as the identity of the young composer, but also all acts and identities of creating music such as songwriting/songwriter, producing/producer, deejaying/deejay, or emceeing/emcee.

## The order that the Learning Experiences are listed in is important, too

In line with this syllabus' regression from praxial approaches to music education towards the aesthetic (Reimer, 1970), Listening has been promoted to the "first place" in the list. Given the constructivist body of work cited in NESA's Evidence Base, the group felt that Playing and Creating should come before Listening. While listening is an active part of playing and creating (Elliott, 2005), and while the syllabus encourages an integrated approach to the Learning Experiences, putting it first may suggest that listening is a priority, detached from other musical knowledges in contradiction with the evidence base which states that "music making of all kinds—and, of course, the rich kind of music listening required to make music well—should be at the centre of the music curriculum" (Elliott, 2005). In addition, we agreed that music begins with vibration, the act of playing or creating, with listening the subsequent part of those actions. The order, then, should be "Playing, Creating, and Listening".

# Relevance of the draft syllabus to further study, lifelong music, and the profession

We found that the current draft syllabus does not prepare students for tertiary music education nor music careers. It shows lack of understanding of musical cultures outside Western Art Music (WAM), which is a very narrow proportion of musical practice in contemporary Australia (about 1%), and directly contradicts the praxial focus of the Evidence Base. There are no examples of sophisticated understanding of any other musical cultures, and very few examples of understanding of modern music practices, especially around the use of music technology. While we understand that following NESA policy, prescriptive lists of content must be given, monocultural examples aren't helpful. Teachers can teach the knowledge authentic to the music being studied. Authentically diverse curriculum requires inclusiveness, yet the syllabus only show a sophisticated understanding of one musical culture. This document aims to address music education to equip students with the skills of listening, music creating, and critical thinking skills to achieve diverse and inclusive outcomes.

Music teachers are trained musicians, creative artists who can interpret the syllabus according to their student cohorts and their own backgrounds. As such, the syllabus should provide valuable information for teachers to maintain their skills to teach music including their depth of knowledge of current music education. For example, recent research on the mathematical aspects of music (Cohn, 2022), visualising music, engagement, and concepts through which to develop each student's listening and creating music skills.

# Correspondence from authors cited in NESAs Evidence Base

We invited three of the scholars quoted in NESAs Evidence Base to comment on the draft syllabus. We specifically asked them whether the draft, especially the Stage 5 content, was written in line with their research.

## Professor Emeritus Thomas Regelski

I found a note from David to which I briefly responded.

My response to your document is I am sorry to say that I find it profoundly misguided.

First, as you refer to often, it is really a syllabus. For me, a big difference from a curriculum

Even as a curriculum, it runs into astonishing detail that would be very difficult to teach from.

My lack of details in this report to you will be greatly overcome by consulting my recent book *Curriculum Philosophy and Theory for Music Education Praxis* (Oxford 2021). It's quite a short book and deals with the important difference between syllabus and curriculum.. If you can't get it in your part of the world, I'd be delighted to send you a copy in lieu of this brief feedback. I've also almost finished a shorter version that students can use with other texts in any music education course, not just philosophical foundations. I attach it here (as I already did for David, but I don't want it circulated until it's finished).

David quickly got to the core of the problem. You have written a Structure of the Discipline document that starting with pitch expands to cover the rest of the discipline, like a music appreciation text. The difference from a praxical/pragmatic curriculum is that in the latter knowledge is used as a tool to some musical end.

## Honorary Associate Professor Peter Dunbar-Hall

Please note that I use terms as they appear in syllabuses. So for 'form' I would usually use 'plan, template, pattern, design.'

To me, learning music is achieved through experiences of discriminatory listening, creative endeavour (experimenting, improvising, arranging, composing), practical work (so many tasks leading to performance – rehearsing, workshops, etc), and development of musical understanding (notation, history, social contexts, organology, performance practice, theory, terminology, etc, etc).

I miss seeing reference to studying music from all periods, places, contexts and styles. Instead, this favours WAM and jazz. Seems an odd selection. This means that despite some mention of non-Western music, the syllabus presents a West-centric idea that other types of music are not as valid in the whole picture of music, and that Western tonality is a kind of universal style from which other musics deviate rather than existing as their own, valid systems of thought.

While thinking about non-Western music (that term also defines other musics as not Western, using the West as the yardstick for validity) the term 'other culture' in the syllabus is out of time and place. This term was deleted from NSW syllabuses in the 1990s as it achieves no purpose. The accepted term is 'music of a culture' – and that can be defined in many ways: geographically, religiously, socially, historically, politically, ability, age, gender, sexuality, etc.

I think, reading the syllabus excerpts, that it is too content driven, rather than being process oriented. It lists things to be learnt (eg sonata form) rather than development of understanding of how sonata form works, why it works the way it does, how it developed in time and place, how it has been used over time, how different people have manipulated it. If these things had been learnt about one form, those ideas could then be applied to other plans for pieces of music, resulting in understanding of the need for, uses of, conventions for, and disagreement with plans for pieces of music. Maybe students could make up their own forms.

In relation to form, there is not an understanding that all types of music from all periods, places, contexts and styles have plans, some of which are well established (eg the Spanish medieval zajal; classical Indian alap – gat – jor; Balinese pengawit – pengawak – pengecet) and some of which are new. Some forms travel between cultures, times and places. Learning about specific forms is OK, provided that this learning covers the generic issues at play.

The syllabus excerpts mention texture, but list only three. Heterophony is missing – yet this refers to jazz which is listed as a topic of the syllabus. The focus on texture should be not only on identifying individual textures, but on how they are created and how they are manipulated within pieces of music.

Listing of specific content such as cadences, scales, etc is limited and again favours a view of music as defined by Western characteristics. Each music has its own protocols, so rather than studying just Western scales, I would want to see experience of pitch sets from many places (Indian ragas; Balinese saih and patet, etc) relating to the music being studied at the time. Some examples written into the syllabus document using correct terminology (not translations into English) would indicate that musics from different places are to be studied in and on their own terms (in Balinese music, the different five note patets [sub-pitch sets] of the seven note saih pitu [overall seven note pitch set] have their own names [selisir, tembung, etc] and are not to be thought of as pentatonic, with connotations of and similarities to Western folk music).

In general, I think the syllabus excerpts are too narrow; they focus on a limited number of types of music; they imply that Western music is the defining type of music against which other types will be labelled and criticised; they do not cover music from all periods, places, styles and contexts; the approach is content driven and seems to focus on facts rather than ideas; there does not seem to be a wish to learn through engagement with music as a process or to understand how musical processes work to create pieces of music.

## Emeritus Professor David Elliott

Yes, as you say, what's problematic about the syllabus is, as you say, that on one hand, it is correct (I believe) about emphasizing that music ought to be taught through action, not dominated by talking about music (as in music appreciation courses); but, on the other hand, the syllabus is organized very much like a Western



Classical Music music appreciation text with its heavy emphasis on the elements and forms of "musical works."

The hidden assumption here is that if/when students can identify/explain the elements and forms of works, then they will enjoy music more because they know (verbally) more about it. There is absolutely no research to support this claim. None. In fact, I believe it's the opposite. No active music making, no joy, no musical growth, etc.

The central fallacy of the elements/form approach traces its roots to a misunderstanding of the nature of cognition---"I think, therefore I am." I can talk about something, therefore I know it. Wrong! (Many neuroscientists, among others, think and act on this belief, even if/when they know better). Notice the failure to mention the body.

[cont...]

Since the late 1990s a new generation of neuroscientists (and scholars in many other fields) have written numerous articles and books which argue persuasively that cognition is not a verbal, input-out-processing, computational "machine." Rather, human cognition is fundamentally a body-based (embodied) process. Although a few authors have applied this idea to music, the only detailed book about this theme is one that I co-wrote (and was published by MIT Press on August 30). *Musical Bodies, Musical Minds: Enactive Cognitive Science and the Meaning of Human Musicality*. I've attached a pdf copy of the book. If you want a hard copy of the book, please give me your address and I'll send you one.

See the last chapter, Praxis. This chapter details the fallacies of the computational view and Reimer's old aesthetic education---the elements/form--approach, which says almost nothing about music performing.

I've also attached a copy of an article by my wife (I Drum, I Sing, I Dance), which contrasts the Classical performance approach with her West African drumming, singing, and dancing course. Note the lack of instructional talk, elements, etc, in the West African "approach" and the powerful experiences and learning that occurred, and what students "took" back to their Orchestra and Band activities.

This is exactly what I think you're saying about what you think the syllabus should contain.

I think one answer (pedagogically and politically) to the problem with the syllabus is that if it could let go to the elements/form approach to some degree and focus more on actually learning to make even one non-Western music, then action and embodied learning would replace the emphasis on talk, talk, talk. I know there are pedagogical challenges to this approach, but they can be solved, and they have been.

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# The team's annotated and edited version of the syllabus

This document can be found here. Comments and track changes have been left in very deliberately.

<https://bit.ly/NESAevidence4>