

Shaping arts training in response to community needs

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Speech at 'Creating Connections', an arts industry forum hosted by ARTV & CREATE at the North Melbourne Town Hall Arts House

In the flier for this forum, my section has been entitled 'Shaping Community'.

This phrase appears to have an implicit subject: that is, that there is an unstated force at work busy shaping communities into some ideal structure. It appears to be expected that I will inform you about this phenomenon.

If there is such a force, it is one with which I have no sympathy, and it is certainly not something I'm going to devote any energy to talking about.

Instead, I'm going to talk about how the needs of communities should be influencing, and can influence, the development of training curricula and delivery.

That is, I'm turning what was a nice turn of phrase on its head.

It is communities that should be doing the shaping, rather than being shaped.

I should say at the outset that I am speaking with a degree of practical experience on this matter.

I've been the Executive Officer of Community Music Victoria for nearly two years now, and in that time I've been exposed, virtually daily, to demands from:

- communities wishing to make their own art;
- grass roots community development activists and workers wishing to introduce effective participatory arts practice into the communities in which they work;
- social policy and community service bureaucrats looking for ways to utilise participatory arts practices for the achievement of community building, community engagement, community health, community wellbeing, community cohesion, community inclusion and community sustainability priorities;
- teachers wishing to integrate regular arts experience into their students' education; and, of course,
- artists wishing to work with and for communities.

Which is to say that I have witnessed a huge, and constantly growing, demand for practical examples of ways in which citizens can, together, find effective ways of making their own art.

What has become clear is that while there is an enormous desire out there, there is also a significant lack of the skills needed to effectively fulfil those desires.

There is a widespread demand for arts-focused skill development in communities.

Over the past two years, we at Community Music Victoria have attempted to rationalise these community expressions into a coherent statement of skills development needs. It is this work that will inform the bulk of this talk.

But before I start to get specific, it's worth noting that this demand is occurring within a very wide, and increasingly widely appreciated, social context.

Most simply (possibly simplistically), this context can be described as the growth of re-engagement.

In *'The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning'*, the small book I've written for the Victorian Cultural Development Network, I've tried to encapsulate the connections between the arts, culture, human rights, community, governance, democracy and social policy.

Although, in this book, I have not specifically explored what implications these connections have on the policies informing arts training, I think it would be obvious to any reader that they are quite considerable. *[contact and purchase details are shown at the conclusion of the paper].*

Briefly, these connections involve the recognition of a number of key issues. Namely:

- the intense relationship between community building and participatory arts;
- the profound potential of community creativity and the social necessity for this to be exercised;
- the cultural rights of communities;
- the need for sustainability (including, not least, cultural sustainability) and the urgent pressure to discover ways in which this can be achieved; and,
- the need for leadership and skilled facilitation in this field.

These connections imply a set of challenging frameworks for arts training providers. They suggest that there are:

- new sets of people for whom arts related training packages could be designed;
- new curricula informed by the recent developments in social context; and
- new methods of delivery to be designed that accommodate the needs of trainees and that are appropriate to the new curricula.

(I should acknowledge that really, none of this is particularly new. It's more that we are probably in a better position than ever before to clearly understand the context in which this training can be offered)

As a slight digression, I should make it clear that, even though I recognise their importance, I am NOT talking about:

- regional touring of professional performing arts companies or exhibitions;
- the commissioning of locally relevant work from professional artists;
- artists engaging in individual tuition; or,
- professional artists working with planners, architects and the like.

All these activities also require a range of specific skills from the artists to ensure that their relationships with their employers/partners/collaborators are fruitful and that their output is productive. But the point is that it is THEIR output.

I am concerned with the output of communities.

What I am talking about is new skills, and ways of acquiring those skills, for:

- community activists;
- community development workers; and for,
- professional artists;

which, as a result, enhance the capacity of communities to make their own art

As I said earlier, at Community Music Victoria we have gone quite a way towards formally expressing our understanding of the why, who, what and how of community music skills development.

It's probably best that I run through where we've got to, rather than attempting to re-cast everything substituting 'arts' for music.

Anyway, I am reasonably convinced that what works for music is, by and large, relevant to the other art forms.

To begin with the inherent values:

The range of skills identified in this talk is based on a clear view of the primary characteristics of community music making.

It involves:

- music making in groups (with a significant degree of collaborative decision-making);
- music making that reflects and illuminates the culture of the participants;
- music making in the moment (that is, not in preparation for some future public event);
- music making that is built on and unleashes the creative capacities of the participants in the immediate situation in which it is occurring.

In light of these characteristics, the role of the skilled individual has a specific focus when involved in facilitating community music making:

- Skilled musicians have a primarily facilitative / inspirational role. Their main function is to liberate the creativity of the groups they work with rather than to use the situation as a basis for making their own music.
- The primary function of teachers/trainers/educators is to develop group music making capacities rather than to teach music theory.

It is essential that trainees emerge from training programs with:

A trust in the creative capacities of all participants and a commitment to liberating that creativity in a group context.

I'll now outline the essential skills necessary for the effective facilitation of community music-making

They are diverse: from the ability to enhance music making skill amongst participants in a group context to the facilitation and engagement skills required for working for, with and in communities.

The objectives of a training program for community music should include achieving competencies in the following:

- Music and music teaching skills, including basic ensemble, improvisation and composition techniques
- Cultural sensitivity (ie, what it means to work with people with special or particular needs that are radically different from one's own)
- Grasp of & facility with group teaching techniques
- Exposure to repertoire and techniques appropriate to various stages of community music making
- Workshop leadership
- Ongoing leadership and co-ordination
- How to establish shared goals in a new group
- How to ensure that a group of people with widely disparate skills develops activities that fulfil and challenge ALL the participants
- How to work with groups of people with widely disparate cultural backgrounds within the group; ie, finding musical paths that transcend cultural specificity and/or finding culturally specific directions that may be transferable across cultures

- Aural music methodology: ie, methods of encouraging improvisation, arranging and composition among the notationally challenged
- Motivational techniques for dealing with unwilling participants
- How to develop non-threatening performance contexts
- Methods of transforming unproductive behaviours in a group context (eg, building confidence in the shy, channelling the behaviour of the aggressive)
- Documentation techniques
- Evaluation techniques
- Initiation, design and management of community-based projects
- Understanding of, and facility with working with and within government and community structures

Beyond these mandatory skills, there are some more specific issues that deserve attention

These arise when the work is with particular communities and/or in particular forms. These particularities need to be covered within a skills development program.

Specific communities

For example, with groups that are disabled, incarcerated, homeless, institutionalised, non-english speaking, Indigenous, in public housing, in the workplace, in rural settings, at risk, in schools and so on.

Specific genres

For example, percussion, singing, instrumental ensembles, instrument building, working in conjunction with other art forms (eg, dance, theatre)

Accommodating education policy objectives

There is a growing appreciation of the value of arts participation as a stimulant to wider learning capacities, its integration of physical skills with both sides of the brain activities, and its contribution to the development of social competencies. An understanding of this field, and an ability to talk this talk would be a useful adjunct to a facilitator's capacities.

Accommodating social policy objectives

Generating support for participatory music making at this time usually involves being able to deal with and express a clear understanding of a range of social policy issues - community health, community building, social inclusion, etc. Practitioners need to develop an understanding of how these issues impact on their work.

Applying evaluation techniques

Public support requires public accountability. Furthermore, the generation of ongoing support for participatory music making requires effective documentation and analysis of results. These techniques are an essential part of the community musician's skill-base

Not all the various interest groups will need training in all of these areas

In fact, there will be particular skill requirements relevant to particular groups. For example:

Community music practitioners, amateurs , facilitators & leaders will need:

Methodologies appropriate to specific communities with whom an individual has not worked before (I will deal with this in a bit more detail later)

Access to, and practice in, new and/or demonstrably effective approaches to participatory music making.

Exchange and active reflection with other practitioners (anecdotal and prepared, practical and theoretical).

Community development workers will need:

Elementary group music making techniques

Professional musicians will need:

Community facilitation/engagement techniques

Post-secondary music students will need:

Theoretical and practical grounding in participatory music making.

Music teachers/educators will need:

Outreach techniques, particularly in student/parent/wider community initiatives

Group, as distinct from one-to-one, music making techniques

As a slight digression, there are a few issues specifically related to music education

These include:

- the role of the school as a community-wide resource for music making, in particular the role of music teachers in facilitating community-wide music making and the skills/training required to enable them to work effectively in this area
- the training of music educators that will enable them to deal with the musics of interest to their students
- the training of music educators in skills necessary to enhance group music making (as distinct from individualised and theoretical training in single instruments)

- ways in which music can be applied across the whole schools curriculum
- the enhancement of schools-based ensembles
- the role of visiting artists and the training of artists to be able to work in community / educational contexts.
- The capacity of the public education system to allow musicians to engage with students within the school context

There is a range of ways in which skills development can be delivered:

Networking & exchange

The most informal and yet possibly most effective way of introducing both the range of skills needed in community music making and exposing participants to new ideas is in face-to-face situations.

Setting up a series of networking and exchange opportunities, probably in a seminar-type context (with experienced practitioners talking about their experiences and 'show-and-tell' sessions at which outlines of projects could be presented and with ensuing discussion about their implementation and effects) would be a useful way forward.

Mentorships, secondments & apprenticeships

Working alongside an experienced practitioner (or at least being able to seek advice from such a person while pursuing one's own work) is an extremely effective skills development environment. A program that supported placements of this kind would be of great value.

Demonstrational roadshows

A touring event involving a team of experienced community music practitioners that includes the following activities:

- masterclasses for community music leaders and music teachers;
- masterclasses for local community-based music groups;
- performances by experienced community-based ensembles;
- joint performances by visiting groups and participants in the masterclasses;
- school-based group music-making activities.

This event could be scheduled over a two or three day period and be co-ordinated with a local event (eg, a festival, eisteddfod or schools get together).

Its specifics would be designed in conjunction with local community music leaders and would be situated within an ongoing program of musical activities. These would

include networking/seminar programs and could be integrated with other strategies for networking and information dissemination.

Short-term intensives and residentials

One day / weekend gatherings in which there is a focus on a particular topic. May be as varied as West African Drumming, coping with leadership burn-out, repertoire exchange or the latest fast teaching of the scales technique.

Publication of manuals

- brochures outlining already existing opportunities for skills development
- creation of training manuals specifically designed to guide users through particular developmental stages.

Formal courses (stand alone & as part of already established courses)

The first step may be to bring together experienced community music practitioners to articulate the skills required and to build course outlines/content which fulfils these expressions.

Within music training institutions, one could envisage a range of pilot projects along a path like this:

- On-campus one-off elective workshops employing sessional 'experts' to introduce/expose undergraduate music students to community music theory and practice
- Off-campus student placements in community music projects in a mentor situation
- Out-of-semester intensives (eg, summer or winter schools)
- Post graduate diploma
- Undergraduate elective unit or units
- Undergraduate mandatory unit or units
- Degree
- Outreach programs for community activists
- A 'community music making facilitator' certificate for experienced musicians

In conclusion,

there are currently great opportunities for training providers to design and deliver a range of programs that can meet community needs in the participatory arts area. There's a lot to do, but also a climate in which programs which focus on community building have the potential to attract widespread support.

Thankyou.

The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: culture's essential role in public planning is published by the Cultural Development Network of Victoria in association with Common Ground Publishing. Copies can be purchased from www.theHumanities.com

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