The role of VET and VCAL in the field of Music/Music Industry Education in schools

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Applied learning is becoming increasingly popular in Victorian schools and many students who are interested in hands-on learning prefer to study Vocational Education and Training (VET) subjects and undertake the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). The author is a Casual Relief Teacher (CRT) of Music and has visited and taught in many schools located in the South Eastern suburbs of Victoria. Among these educational institutions there were a few secondary schools/colleges where VCAL/VET subjects were offered in music and music industry related studies. Although many school students understand the benefits of undertaking the VCAL/VET as a straight pathway to the work force or university via Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions and this method offer more hands-on/practical approach to learning, they avoid even discussing it as the other students who prefer the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) qualifications tend to bully them as underachievers. However in many schools that offer VCE music, the Music Industry Studies (for example Sound Production) are not incorporated and school students who are keen to undertake VET/VCAL subjects face these disadvantages including the social/peer pressure.

As Victorian educational institutions including schools struggle to provide multicultural music education the researcher suggests VET as a strategy to employ through the engagement of artists in residence. It is important for the researchers to investigate involved issues and promote such beneficial, practical/hands-on education among school students. It is essential to promote and explain the value of such education through evidence based research. These attempts may lead to the development of the VET sector contributing to the enhancement of the skilled work force in Australia.

Introduction to VET in schools

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools (VET in Schools or VETiS) is explained as "a way to do career focused training while at secondary school" in the website of the Chisholm Institute (Chisholm Institute, 2008, para. 1). The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) (2010) states that VET in schools "began with a small pilot study in 1993" (P.3). Electronics, Hospitality and Office Administration were offered as dual recognition areas and "in the late 1990s the VCAA (then Board of Studies) redeveloped VET in Schools programs", placing them in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) "units 1 to 4 structure to allow the programs to contribute to the VCE" (VCAA, 2010, p.3). VCAA (2010) further claims that "currently profiled VCE/VET programs comprise over 30 separate qualifications" and "since the introduction of VET into the VCE, enrolments have steadily increased to approximately 61 000 students in 2009" (p.3). These programs include a large range of subjects such as Agriculture, Automotive, Building and Construction, Conservation and Land management and Horticulture. The units of these programs are assessed against the relevant competency standards. In the VET units of competence, the results are reported as S-Satisfactory or N-Not Yet Completed. For subjects such as Business, Community services, Dance, Information Technology and Music, scored assessment methods are used. In the field of Music education these programs/courses include Music Performance/Composition, Music Industry: Technical/Sound Production and Music Business.

This educational option involves practical/hands-on learning methods. In many instances the training is provided in work places and assessment is carried out in the workplace. Therefore "VET in the VCE or VCAL allows students to include vocational studies within their senior secondary certificate" (VCAA, 2010, p. 2). Regarding the compatibility VCAA (2010) points out that

> the recognition of (VET) and Further Education (FE) within the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) means that students who complete all or part of a nationally recognised VET or FE qualification may receive credit towards satisfactory completion of their VCE and/or VCAL (p.2).

These conditions also apply similarly to recognition of music education qualifications. Armstrong et al. (2010) explained "the VCE VET Music program is available for students who are enrolled in the VCAL" (p. 15). As mentioned before VET qualifications are Nationally Accredited credentials which are recognised in all states of Australia thus persons who hold these qualifications have the flexibility of using them anywhere in the country for purposes such as employment and further education in different institutions. It is mentioned in the Chisholm Institutes' website that "A VET in Schools qualification can assist you to move on to an apprenticeship, other employment, or further study" (Chisholm Institute, 2008, para. 4). Therefore it is important to understand the advantage of undertaking VET studies in schools and explain these benefits to students and their parents in order to promote this applied educational approach. However the researcher noted on several occasions that the Victorian secondary school students and their parents are not aware of those advantages associated with studying VET subjects in schools. In this paper the author researcher employs a phenomenological approach to describe his personal experiences gained through teaching music in different Victorian schools as a Casual Relief Teacher (CRT). The intention of the author is to inform the stakeholders about the important role VET and VCAL in the field of music/music industry education in schools and to promote such beneficial method of music education seeing that this approach as one of the most suitable and effective methods of passing on knowledge and skills in a practical subject for instance music. Green (2008) has also pointed out the importance of applied/hands-on approach in learning music through engagement, interaction and observations. Different approaches are employed to facilitate such learning in the Victorian context and the following section explains those various modes of delivery used in the VET.

Modes of delivery

It is mandated for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to conduct VET programs and these RTOs are responsible for "the delivery, assessment and certification of VET qualifications" and in Victoria "the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) regulates all education and training providers" (VCAA, 2010, p.4). "Schools that register to deliver training become responsible for all elements of delivery, assessment and quality assurance, as well as the awarding of certificates and statements of attainment" (VCAA, 2010, p.4). In addition there are options for partnerships between schools and external RTOs to provide VET education in schools. These include: delivery by the school of the whole program, under the auspices of the RTO, Delivery at the school by an RTO, Shared

delivery, undertaking VET on-site at an RTO and delivery in the work place (VCAA, 2010). In some areas there are VET clusters to enhance these programs. It is explained that "clusters allow participating schools to improve the provision and range of VET programs as schools share facilities and staff expertise" and with such arrangement "students from one school may attend another school auspiced by an RTO to undertake their training" (VCAA, 2010, p.5). This can also be use as an alternative strategy to auspice other schools or provide training to students for a school registered as an RTO. Some of the aforementioned modes of delivery of the VET programs can be considered as highly appropriate strategies for learning music and music industry skills from professionals in practice, in different environments such as live performances and musical events, operating sound systems (Public Addressing Sound Systems) and handling recording sessions. Hands on learning and apprenticeship learning are considered as the most authentic and effective methods of learning music in different (multicultural) musical traditions including in Western music transmission (Davies, 2003; Green, 2008; Griffiths & Woolf, 2009). Learning through engagement in different professional contexts is considered as highly effective for music and music industry related subjects (Stagg, 2010). Furthermore these programs prepare musicians in "a music industry relevant way" as discussed by Stagg (2010, p.1). However as a result of different issues, many students miss out on receiving this type of education. This can be associated with the non availability of resources (especially in regional/rural areas) such as TAFE colleges and facilitators for schools to work in partnerships. Confirming this Victorian researchers Joseph and Southcott (2011) point out that finding resources, time and appropriate experts to educate students in (multicultural) music is problematic. To investigate issues involved in multicultural music teaching in Victorian schools, an online survey was conducted last year by the author and 60% of the participants indicated that "they do not teach different types of music other than Western music" due to the lack of knowledge and resources (Nethsinghe, 2011, p.10).

In Victoria music courses of degree level (starting from Certificate levels, developing to Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Degree) Bachelor of Applied Music (BAM) are currently offered only in two metropolitan TAFE colleges, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) and the Box Hill TAFE. It can be assumed that as a result of this many regional and rural schools do not offer the aforementioned VET/VCAL courses in music. Despite the fact that VET Music courses are available (including for FE), students in suburban schools prefer undertaking VCE Music and some of these reasons will be discussed in a later part of this paper. Petersen (2009) claimed that "access to formal (school based) music education still remains the preserve of the privileged" (p.160) and with my own experiences teaching music in the Victorian context, it is possible to claim that the situation is worse in the case of VET music education particularly in outer suburban schools. As this is a descriptive discussion that involves the experience of the author teacher/researcher teaching in different schools, phenomenology is selected as the most apposite research method and this is discussed in the next section of this paper.

The methodological approach

Smith (2005) defines phenomenology as a study of 'phenomena'—the ways in which we experience things and the meanings that are engendered by these experiences. Further, Johnson and Christensen (2004) maintain that "the key element of a phenomenological

research study is that the researcher attempts to understand how people experience a phenomenon from the person's own perspectives" (p.46). This paper is exploratory and is an attempt to understand the role of VET/VCAL in schools and how schools students experience the differences of undertaking different pathways/options of education and training with particular reference to music education.Describing this approach van Mannen (2006) stated that "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or the meaning of our everyday experiences" (p.10) and he further maintained that "phenomenological descriptions if done well, are compelling and insightful (p. 9). This paper involves a phenomenological description of researcher personal experiences as a teacher. The data considered in this research were mainly generated during last four years (since 2008) through observations and researcher journals written during teaching visits as a Casual Relief Teacher of Music (CRT) mainly in the schools located in South Eastern suburbs of Victoria and a few regional and rural schools. Then the gathered data were analysed employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Fade (2004) maintained that "IPA is phenomenological" and the most pertinent method of data analysis for phenomenological research studies. Smith (2005) pointed out that by using IPA researchers attempt to understand how participants make sense of their personal and social world experiences. The author researcher employs a descriptive approach in this paper to report some of his (selected) experiences and observations about the subject through the following narrative.

Description of the occurrences

A few years ago as a requirement for my Graduate Diploma in (music) Education, I selected a rural school to undertake my pre-service teaching practicum (professional placement). The duration was five weeks and I stayed in a small country town during this time. It is important to articulate these facts as I had the opportunity to observe how students used their skills learnt at schools (especially from VET subjects) in their farms and at home helping their parents. I saw many students using these skills in sheering, fencing, carpentry and motor mechanics (maintaining heavy vehicles and machinery). In addition it was possible to observe a (female) student working in her mother's beauty salon as a hair dresser after school. The High School was in a partnership with the regional TAFE College and students had to visit the TAFE once a week. They also had two VET qualified teachers in the school as permanent staff members teaching subjects such as hospitality, wood work and motor mechanics. As I accompanied these students during their TAFE visits I was able to observe how they learn 'real life skills' through an engaging hands-on method. As a part of the pre-service teaching practicum it is essential to take part in school activities other than teaching the specialised subject, in my case Music.

Interestingly this school had a very strong music department run by a highly talented/skilled multi-instrumentalist music teacher. This teacher was running a fascinating music program which included an instrumental program, a big band and an annual musical. Many students were actively engaged in these musical activities and studies. Among them there were some talented and skilled students who were keen to study music further but they were not interested in continuing music studies or considering employment in the field of music. I learnt about their abilities as I taught (classroom) music and conducted instrumental lessons during the practicum and in a conversation about their future plans some students

mentioned that if they had the opportunity to undertake further studies in music (without moving to Melbourne) they would do so. One student stated that "in our TAFE there isn't a music degree, I am not after a paper qualification but thinking of a career, even if you want to become a music teacher you got to have the paper [qualification]". Another student (a girl who played drums) mentioned "next year I will be going to another high school [in a nearby bigger town] just to do music for VCE for ensemble cos this school does not offer music for VCE" she further mentioned that "sadly we do not have the option of VET music in this place". She continued "but I might move to Melbourne later on and study music at the VCA [Victorian College of Arts], it's good to move than staying here and becoming a dummy or a tradie going to this ...TAFE here, they have nothing good". The frustration of this student was clearly evident as the options for further studies and courses were limited. Most interestingly the word "dummy" (this girl used) indicated the views of society (including parents of students) about the marginalised status of students undertaking VET studies. Haycock and Anderson (2006) explained the marginalised groups as the people who struggle with difficulties such as financial and communication (skills). These include "people who struggle to keep up with technologisation, ...people with low literacy skills, people who have been unsuccessful or not completed compulsory schooling, and people who do not speak English" language well enough (p.8). Haycock and Anderson (2006) claimed that "Many people from these relatively powerless groups 'end up' in the VET system" further explaining the situation they have cited Taylor and Henry (1994), "Historically the provider of (primarily male) working class education in Australia, VET has more recently become a policy 'dumping ground', dealing 'cheaply' with the political problem of what to do with those who can't get jobs or university places" (p.8). The aforementioned girl did not want to be coined as an underachiever nor identified as a member of this social group. This is what was hinted at when she stated that she prefers the University even if she has to relocate herself in Melbourne.

These types of attitudes towards students undertaking VET/VCAL studies were noticed throughout my entire teaching career in many schools (especially in suburban areas) since becoming a school music teacher in Victoria. I have visited and worked in different schools as a Casual Relief Teacher (CRT) in the South Eastern suburbs in Victoria. However I met a student with a different attitude. He knew the available educational options and had planned his career path (via VET) and in a discussion he explained "I want to become a sound engineer but I am a good rock guitarist too, you know you got to have backup options to earn money". He explained that "I will go to the TAFE and do the Cert four, then the Diploma and may be the BAM" he further explained that "it depends if I want to go [to] Uni[versity] then it will be easy to get in to do a degree". In the school he undertakes VCE music as he does not like to be identified as an under-achiever. Regarding this he stated that "some schools have VET/VCAL music, but even if we had it here [school] I won't do it...they tease the 'VETies' here". This situation was similar to other schools that I have visited. With these discussions it was possible to understand the fear of students about 'ending up' in the VET system" as mentioned by Haycock and Anderson (2006, p.8). It was found that the social/peer pressure and social beliefs including the negative thoughts about VET in communities play a vital role in students' (especially teenagers') decision making of educational (course) choices. In a different school there were some students who studied VET music subjects and they were assumed to be underachievers by even some of their

teachers. I overheard a conversation in the staff room about these "Rockers", one teacher (of an 'academic' subject) saying that "they are only good for the TAFE". Again these examples highlight the marginalised social status of some educational approaches and categorisation systems, unfortunately in this case it is VET.

Discussion

The outcomes of this research study can be explained in the following way. It was evident that due to the social pressure and demoralization (of the TAFE image) including the lack of resources (such as TAFE colleges and VET programs in schools) in some areas, students in certain Victorian schools are marginalised/excluded from VET in the Music (education) related fields. It was recognized that applied learning in VET, including the teaching/facilitating approaches are highly apposite for Music and Music industry related training/education including those appropriate for multicultural music education. As discussed before applied/hands-on learning (provided in VET) is associated with learning directly from the professionals during work placement.

It is suggested in VCAA (2010) that "the person responsible for the workplace training must have competence at the certificate level being delivered or higher" (p.3). In the case of music education this competency requirement can be achieved by involving artists/ professional musicians. This can also be an effective strategy to engage artists/professional in education and training. Southcott and Joseph (2009) found "inclusion of artists-in-schools to be an intriguing, engaging and authentic way for school pupils and their teachers to engage with music of diverse cultures" (p.13). Multicultural music teaching is a huge issue in Victoria due to the lack of experts and this can be a valuable strategy to involve culture/tradition bearers (artists in residence) to teach in formal educational settings, once they are trained to facilitate/deliver and assess learning. School teachers can also assist these professionals in teaching students. In a broader sense this type of engagement will provide ongoing Professional Development (PD) opportunities for in-service teachers to learn from practising professionals. Considering the field of music, Griffiths and Woolf (2009) advocated that teachers also can learn from artists in the form of PD and use their expertise and knowledge as resources for teaching multicultural music in schools.

A few decades ago Eisner (1974) stated that the people who know a subject most thoroughly and intimately are capable of teaching that subject besting the best way possible.. It is known that the expertise in the subject matter influences the teaching ability of a person. In contemporary understanding pedagogical competence including the adequate subject knowledge is considered as a vital skill for a practising teacher to deliver and facilitate effective education/learning (Baker, 2005). Therefore workplace learning and apprenticeship learning models practiced in VET associated with learning from professionals and experts can be recommended as effective approaches for music education. Stagg (2010) explained that "TAFE style contemporary music training is quite different to conservatorium of music training (commonly sub-sections of universities) where players do acknowledge the skills of other performers but concentrate on becoming masters of their instrument" (p.2). This is another advantage of collaborative learning that concerns multicultural music. In musical genres such as African drumming, playing in groups is an essential skill (Nethsinghe, 2012).

Finally it is essential to mention that this discussion implies that authorities and stakeholders need to develop, enhance and promote such a beneficial approach to music/music industry education by changing the existing social views and by supplying more resources and funding.

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