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Career orientation and pedagogical training: conservatoire undergraduates' insights

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This article explores music conservatoire undergraduates' career aspirations and notions of their pedagogical training, through biographical interviews with 16 students from the School of Wind and Percussion, Royal Northern College of Music. Findings suggest that pedagogical training, which begins in the second college year, serves as a catalyst for changes in career orientation. Students begin, however, with limited intention of teaching. Performance is commonly their focus at the outset. Furthermore, boundaries are perceived between conservatoires which offer elite performance training, and those with a broader curricular base. The practicalities of attracting future students, whilst offering apt and substantial pedagogical erudition within a performance-centred arena, are explored.

Introduction

The Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) offers conservatoire training in the UK that focuses on instrumental performance within Western traditions. In recent years, the RNCM has developed its degree programmes in response to an ever-changing profession.

> The career of a musician today is likely to be a portfolio one, combining several paths. RNCM adopts a flexible approach in preparing students for this aspect of their future. The innovative Supporting Professional Studies strand of the curriculum enables students to develop specialist, business and transferable skills necessary for survival in the profession (RNCM, 2006: 15).

Supporting Professional Studies (SPS) at the college encompasses some 70 curricular activities, devised for its particular instrumental faculties. In this article, our focus is the School of Wind and Percussion (SWP). Since each faculty offers a unique strand of pedagogical training, our research concentrated on one with the intention of developing useful insights for faculty planning.

The SWP offers 14 Supporting Professional Studies options, including jazz, for students undergoing a 4-year Bachelor of Music degree. The derivation 'supporting' here implies lesser importance compared with dominant Western musical traditions. Within undergraduate studies, two years of pedagogical training are currently mandatory. Pedagogy is delivered collectively to students from all the college faculties in Year 2; in Year 3, it

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becomes a specialised, school-centred subject. The distinctive SWP pedagogical strand for Year 3 has developed over the past 5 years; nonetheless, we felt that on-site research might inform further changes. The SWP strand now includes much practical work including group teaching, coaching ensembles, notation-free performance and work with jazz structures. Moreover, teacher shadowing occurs in collaboration with the music services of adjacent boroughs. Three pedagogy tutors, all with experience in secondary education, address the needs of future woodwind, brass and percussion teachers.

There has been recent attention to conservatoire scholarship in the UK. Volume 22, Issue 3 of this journal was a special publication entitled 'Instrumental Teaching in Higher Education'. It carried articles written by conservatoire employees (e.g. Carole Presland, Royal Northern College of Music; David Corkhill, Guildhall School of Music and Drama; David Purser, Birmingham Conservatoire). Cox and Pitts' editorial in that issue underscores the journal's aim of presenting research 'written by professionals for professionals'; additionally, they add, practitioner-researchers in conservatoires can undergo personal development 'through critical reflection on students' and teachers' experiences'. *The Reflective Conservatoire: Studies in Music Education* (Odam & Bannan, 2005) contains research conducted at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (GSMD) along these lines. *Becoming an Orchestral Musician: A Guide for Aspiring Professionals* (Davis, 2004) features interviews with 17 professional instrumentalists yet, whilst presenting interesting viewpoints, the volume 'has little basis in formal research' (Gaunt, 2005b: 320). We concur that more rigorous research can be thought-provoking for conservatoire employees. It can elucidate the relationship between programme aims and content, and the professional world of music. We were interested in this 'degree of fit', and how students' aspirations correspond to courses and change over time. We wanted to address several research questions:

> Do the career aspirations of SWP students change during their training? (Research Question 1)
>
> Are there critical incidents that result in changes in their orientation to career? (Research Question 2)
>
> Does the pedagogical training that students receive from Year 2 act as a catalyst for changes in their career orientation? (Research Question 3)
>
> If pedagogical training does serve as a critical episode, how might it become more significant for students? How might the college enhance this pedagogical training? (Research Question 4)

Most of these questions, we believed, could be addressed through qualitative research with a biographical bent. Certainly, life histories of educators have indicated critical moments (e.g. Sikes, 1985; Huberman, 1993; Baker, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). We suspected that conservatoire undergraduates' thinking would transform similarly. We anticipated 'landmark events' (Kompf, 1993) or 'turning points' (Clausen, 1998) wherein priorities needed to be reconsidered and decisions made that influenced personal development and identity. Identities in music can be regarded as 'the ways in which people view themselves in relation to the social and cultural roles existing within music' (Hargreaves & Marshall,

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2003: 264). Identity is fluid, being 'an amalgam of personal biography, culture, social influence and institutional values, which may change according to role or circumstance' (Day, 2002: 689). Although much biographical research in education has investigated longer tracts of time, we felt that a shorter time-span (i.e. of 4 college years) would offer valuable insights regarding the students' developing personae.

Methodology

Our research interviews were conducted in private rooms at the RNCM between 29 April and 11 June 2005. Sixteen undergraduates from the SWP agreed to participate. Informed consent (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Gregory, 2003; Ryen, 2004) was a core ethical precaution. Interviewees read a letter describing the research and signed a statement of informed consent (Silverman, 2000). We were conscious of each person's right to self-determination. Thus it seemed paramount that participants had information about the project, any further questions had been answered and participation was understood to be voluntary. We stressed that involvement was optional before commencing interviews and through an introductory letter. Furthermore, it was underscored that participants could withdraw from the investigation without prejudice.

It was agreed that David would conduct the tape-recorded discussions and make verbatim transcriptions. David was not a college employee and seemed unknown to students; he worked for a Local Education Authority music service and university, both in a different region of the UK. John's more imposing position as an instrumental professor at the RNCM might easily have affected our data. His presence during interviews might have generated an uncomfortable climate wherein students withheld divergent or, indeed, negative views of their pedagogical training. Presland (2005), who interviewed 12 piano students at the RNCM, also sensed that her 'position as a member of staff [might] have a bearing on the answers that students provided' (p. 238; cf. Gaunt, 2005a on interviewing GSMD teachers). Since David was affiliated with a different higher education institution, it seemed likely that, under the blanket of anonymity he offered, students would give more honest answers. That is to say, David made it clear that off-the-record comments and respondents' real names would not be divulged. It was agreed that no RNCM staff member – John included – would be permitted access to recordings or transcripts before pseudonyms were implemented and other 'identifiers' removed. The use of pseudonyms is standard practice in qualitative research (for instance, see Patton, 2002; Cottle, 2003). During interview sessions, respondents also highlighted sensitive passages to remain unreported; this sensitive text was omitted from transcripts. Utter anonymity could not be guaranteed, of course, since there is much intimate detail in qualitative reporting (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Plummer, 2001). However, we wished to go some way towards ensuring participants' comfort and, therefore, to producing honest and expansive accounts. Another benefit of David's position as interviewer was that he had undergone a university education and was, in comparison to John, relatively inexperienced with regard to the perspectives of those in conservatoires. Owing to the tacit, shared knowledge, it seemed possible that, with a more familiar researcher, important themes might be sidestepped during interviews (cf. Gaunt, 2005a).

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Initial questioning centred on a range of issues sourced from our experience with music education and music careers. The interviews were semi-structured with predetermined topics, allowing latitude for following the interviewee's sense of what is important (Bresler & Stake, 1992). Questions were posed such as:

What career will you have after leaving the college?

Have your career intentions changed over the various college years? Why?

Could you tell me about an incident that explains why your intentions have changed?

Is working in education a desirable option?

Has the pedagogical training that you receive been useful in light of your intentions? Explain why.

Has the pedagogical training influenced your career direction?

How might the pedagogical training be improved?

The undergraduates participated in several interviews. The discussion became more focused during consequent interviews since research motifs had begun to materialise. Respondents were asked to explain themselves: 'Why so?', 'Why is that important?', 'Can you give me an example?' The transcribed interviews were submitted to a NUD*IST software database for coding and analysis (NUD*IST: Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching Theorizing, Version N6 [Victoria, Australia: QSR International, 2002]).

An initial sample of 10 became 16 interviewees through theoretical sampling (Mason, 1996; Silverman, 2001). Several potentially deviant cases – accounts which might have challenged the prevailing analysis – and fresh data from repeat interviews were collected to test our interim ideas. Preliminary findings were replicated in newly collected data (Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994) and negative evidence sought (Dey, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ryan & Bernard, 2000; Seale *et al.*, 2004). Its absence further strengthened our theories. In practice, it was sometimes necessary to consider the substantial weight of certain evidence and not discard a key finding on the basis of a solitary incongruous remark. In the ensuing passages, the number of respondents with a particular viewpoint is indicated if this is the case. Respondents also verified summaries of findings during their follow-up interviews. Social researchers who 'privilege "experience" as "authentic"' will take findings back to the people studied to confirm that they concord with their understandings (Silverman, 2001: 235).

The final sample embraced: individuals in all 4 college years; both genders; orchestral and brass band instrumentalists; and students on a joint course with Manchester University. The interviews ranged from 16 to 51 minutes in length. A total of 16 hours and 23 minutes of tape-recorded data were collected. Our intention was to establish a sample representative of the SWP only, though, with its unique strand of pedagogical training within the college. Findings, we hoped, might influence that strand. With such a small sample, we cannot lay claim to findings that can be generalised to an entire college or to all conservatoires. Nevertheless, the study seemed useful for faculty planning and, we hoped, would afford considerations for future large-scale investigations.

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Findings

First-year students' career aims were typically of performing (number = 4 of 5 respondents in Year 1); this was also consistent with the reminiscences of those in later years (n = 10 of 11 interviewees in Years 2–4). Respondents desired to perform with professional ensembles. More varied occupations, with teaching as an integral component, were considered but, regardless, performing would be central.

> In the back of my mind, I wouldn't be here if I didn't hope that I could eventually work in an orchestra. If I was to come out of college and I wasn't good enough, then I would be disappointed. (Eleanor)

> I really wanted to focus on playing from the beginning. That was what I wanted to do. (Kirsty)

> I wanted to come out of college, do some freelancing and eventually get a position in an orchestra. (Michael)

There were exceptions to the dominance of performing as a future vocational strand, however, (n = 2) such as a tuba player who hoped to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Subsequently, he or she would become a full-time instrumental teacher and an employee of a local authority music service. Additionally, one interviewee saw no vocational pathway for her brass band instrument (e.g. baritone horn, tenor horn) – a teaching career would be necessary.

> Probably my career aims are different from other people here because, realistically, I'm not going to be able to play for my living. Some people do other stuff as well, but *also* need to fall back on the teaching. (Laura)

This did not apply to all brass band instrumentalists; we discovered that cornet players – whose instrument is interchangeable with the trumpet – disregarded this constraint. Certainly, many first-rate cornet players have migrated into the ranks of Britain's professional ensembles. Like these students, young music service employees seem to follow a vocational pathway towards performing rather than teaching careers, albeit unrealistic in some cases (Baker, 2005a, 2005c, 2006). In light of their initial trajectory, they feel unprepared for the teaching profession and contemplate alternative occupations.

Notions of portfolio musicianship advanced by the college seem, to a certain extent, discordant with students' first ideas regarding the function of conservatoire training. Our interviewees had come to study at a conservatoire, they felt, because of the focus on performance and, sometimes due to the college's status in that arena. Universities and other higher education institutions provided a broader musical training, they reflected, with a more 'academic' bent.

> I'm not exceptionally academic, anyway. I knew that I didn't want to write essays. I could have done it, but I just knew that the performance way was the thing that I could deal with for four years. It's good at university because you do get the broader musical training but you don't get the strict instrumental training that we get. (Joshua)

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> At 'uni', you've got lots of stuff and you have to do all-round things. You have to do composing and learn a lot more. They wouldn't mind if you weren't a good performer as long as you're intelligent. (Eleanor)

Other respondents commented:

> It's difficult to learn academically in an institution like this. You would have to force yourself to find out the information. I think you are quite limited in terms of the actual music you study in a place like this; it is very performance-based. (Edward)

> It's not officially frowned upon by the college if you want to do anything else but perform. It's just the unwritten rule, I suppose. I think that it's just such a focused performers' course so, you know . . . If you're going to spend four years of your life training to be a performer and, then, not want to do it afterwards, it's seen as perhaps a bit of a waste of time, really. (Joshua)

Presland (2005) recognised that RNCM piano students attended a conservatoire because they desired to become advanced instrumentalists; consequently, their lack of enthusiasm for other aspects of the curriculum was unsurprising. Amongst music college employees, however, views have differed on whether or not professional performing should be the prime outcome of conservatoire curricula. Presland (2005) describes 'the conservatoire – an institution which seeks to provide specialist musical education and training for our next generation of performers and composers' (p. 237). She also mentions that:

> . . . given the roaming nature of visiting professors . . . staff will tend to work in their own educational and musical worlds, perhaps unwittingly accentuating the division between instrumental lessons and general music education in the minds of their students (Presland, 2005: 247).

The six conservatoire teachers interviewed by Purser (2005), in departure from this, felt that, although a vocation with a symphony orchestra seemed a desirable outcome, 'there are many other areas, more or less closely related to performance, which are equally valid' (pp. 289–290).

Corkhill (2005) has noted that 'conversations with senior conservatoire students [. . .] seem to suggest some unpreparedness and a lack of awareness of the challenges and difficulties of being an orchestral musician' (p. 270). Our research, in contrast, evidenced recognition of 'the difficulties ahead' following the first year of study. When questioned about shifts in their aspirations, second-, third- and fourth-year students noted a profound realisation. We unearthed critical incidents, which challenged individuals' self-identity and direction (Research Questions 1 and 2). The students, below, underscored how their naïve notions had been weathered by time.

> I would still like to play but you become a bit more realistic. You think about what you can and can't do. You learn more about the general musical world. You realise how many people are out there going for the odd performing job that comes up every couple of years. I had a few bad experiences that made me think. (Kirsty)

> It's very difficult to be a full-time performer and realisation has hit this year. The competition is huge. . . . In my first year, there was a guy in his fourth year. He was an amazing player. He walked straight into a job with a professional orchestra while he

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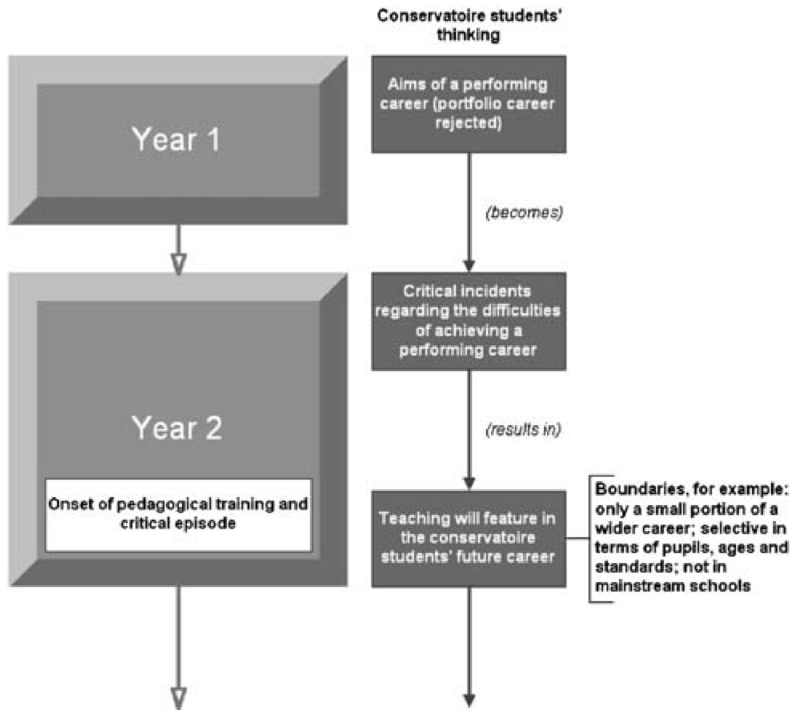

Fig. 1 Career aspiration shift.

> was still a student. Now, to a first year, you see that and just think 'Oh, he's a fourth year. By the time I'm a fourth year, I'll be that good. I'll do that. That's the norm.' . . . *Then* you get to your third year and you're thinking 'I'm nowhere near that standard.' Since I've been here, no student has gone out and got a job in an orchestra. *Then* you get to your fourth year. . . . It's really quite scary. (Simon)

Corkhill's (2005) interviews of 10 conservatoire students on orchestral careers revealed 'Student-perceived disadvantages included that "there aren't many jobs. . ." ' (p. 275) and most qualified optimism with 'phrases of concern or caution' (p. 279). It appeared, for our interviewees, that 'being a musician' would now embrace an educational role. In more extreme cases, this represented dashed hopes:

> I suppose they are forcing you to do [pedagogical training at the college] because the inevitable outcome is that there isn't a lot of work. In a way, teaching is a second choice for a lot of people. (Ross)

Indeed, from Year 2, undergraduates were receptive to teaching playing a part in their future (see Fig. 1). All regarded teaching as the most stable profession. Such a perspective need not influence their choice to diversify personal aims, however, and this calls for additional research. Certainly, for the conservatoire students that Corkhill (2005) interviewed, priorities did not include 'financial reward and a sociably amenable life' (p. 270). Many of our

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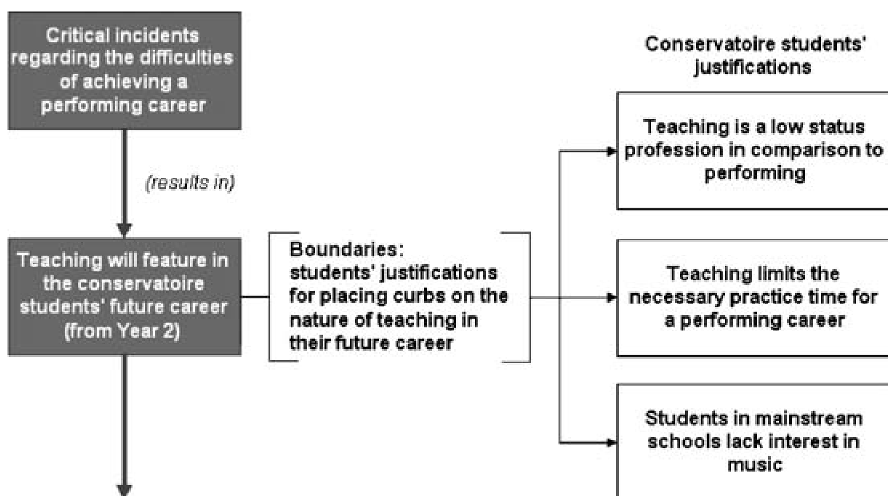

Fig. 2 Justifications for curbs on teaching.

research participants expressed boundaries regarding teaching (n = 10 of 11 interviewees in the second, third and fourth years). These boundaries were expressed variously. Teaching would be: merely an occupational strand; and/or selective in terms of schools, pupils, ages and standards.

> I'm quite willing to become a private instrumental teacher. I'm less enthused about becoming a peripatetic [instrumental] teacher [working in schools for a music service]. (Michael)

> For me, I would have come here to study as much as I can so that I don't have to go and teach in a school. I would want to teach privately and select my pupils. That would be the ultimate goal. . . . if you give the students time to study their instrument, they are not going to find themselves teaching six-year-olds. I don't think I would have come here if I'd intended to become a schoolteacher. (Edward)

These preferences were starkly incongruous with notions of classroom and music service provision for all children. The Labour government's recent *Music Manifesto* has vowed that 'every primary school child should have opportunities for sustained and progressive instrumental tuition, offered free of charge or at a reduced rate' (DfES, 2004). Should young musicians such as these find themselves entering a career in mainstream education – perhaps 'thrown in' because of a restricted labour market – the realities might seem highly disenchanting.

Year 2 clearly marked the onset of a critical episode wherein priorities underwent revision; these boundaries on how teaching might feature seemed intriguing, though. Negative impressions of instrumental education in schools were cited as reasons for placing curbs on how teaching would feature in one's vocation (see Fig. 2). Some students felt there was a lack of real interest in music from children in schools (n = 10 of 11 respondents in Year 2 and above). Edward, for example, reflected on his encounters in a secondary school:

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> I've taught before at a school and I found it the most unpleasant experience. You have a lot of people who don't actually want to study music. They are trying to get out of Maths or whatever. You have people knocking at the door all the time making faces. It's a really unpleasant environment. I mean, I really do feel for the people who teach in schools because it must be very, very demoralizing. (Edward)

Students at the Royal College of Music have also stated that a disadvantage of music teaching is 'working with children who are poorly behaved, or not interested' (Mills, 2005: 71). Routinely (n = 15 of the overall sample of 16 respondents), instrumental teaching in mainstream schools was ascribed with low status, whereas performing retained the highest status. Perhaps this stratification provided a window on underlying career desires – the interviewees' ideal future – albeit occupational hopes often subdued in later college years.

> I think a performer would be the highest status and then private instrumental teacher.

> It's only my opinion but I think peripatetic [instrumental teaching in state schools] would probably be last. School teaching is above that, yeah, I think so. (Michael)

> If you were applying for a credit card people would say the status of a teacher is higher than a performer. To me, as a musician, a performer is higher status. (Dean)

> You can't just fall into a performing career. I think you can fall into teaching. I have an awful lot of respect for teachers, *but* someone can do a PGCE and then become a teacher. . . . It's the same with peripatetic [instrumental] teaching [in schools]. I would say [that] teaching is the lowest status profession, in my mind, and then classroom teaching, then private teaching and then performing. (Simon)

Additionally, working in education was perceived as a career trap for those students who desired to emerge chiefly as performers (n = 9 of 11 interviewees in Year 2 and above). Teaching would consume too much time, thus impeding potential opportunities for performance.

> Performers can get stuck in a rut with teaching. That is probably true to a certain extent although a Head of Department here is still in a professional orchestra and [he or she] does teaching here. So [he or she] manages to juggle everything. It is an exception. . . The trouble is, in an institution like this, most of the teachers are the very best and they manage to juggle everything anyway (laughs). (Anne)

> If you are classroom teaching, as well, it's such a lot of your time that you couldn't progress as a musician very much. (Edward)

Simon cautioned succinctly:

> Some people go down the 'peripatetic route' [i.e. working for a Local Education Authority music service supplying instrumental teaching in state schools] and start teaching peripatetically, but that's almost a dangerous route from what I've seen. People start doing that to get money, but then don't get a chance to practise. They become a full-time peripatetic teacher doing a job that they didn't originally intend to do. (Simon)

Indeed, one interviewee was offered employment with a music service in July 2005 and declined for this reason.

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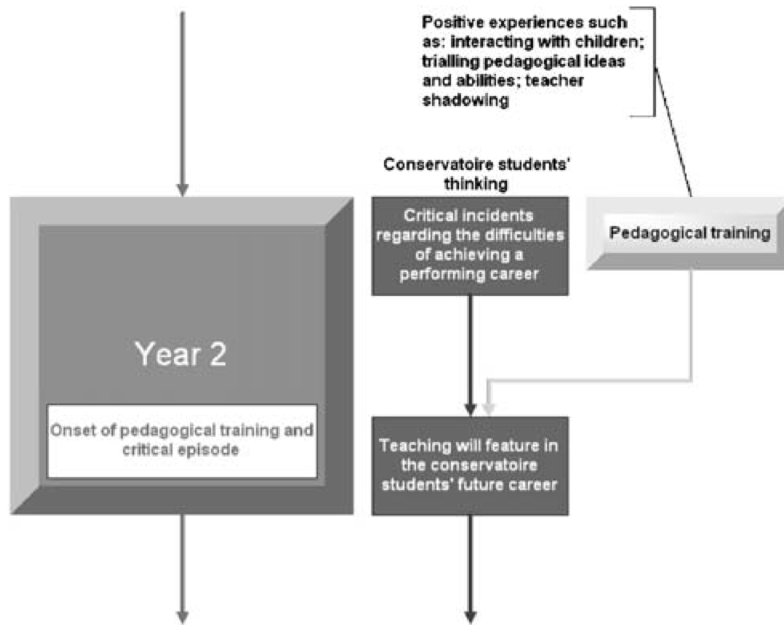

Fig. 3 Positive attributes of pedagogical training.

The critical episode commencing in Year 2 meant that a future role as pedagogue became increasingly significant for our undergraduates. Pedagogical training was responsible for making notions of a portfolio career more concrete (Research Question 3; 10 of 11 interviewees in Year 2 and above).

> The [pedagogical] training has made me rethink my future as a musician. (Ross)

> You begin to realize how difficult being a performer is; because of the [pedagogy] course, I will probably spread my professional activities. (Anne)

We wondered how the pedagogy course might become a more formative programme in terms of the young musicians' identities (Research Question 4). Their insights regarding the programme (see Figure 3) might, we thought, be utilized in SWP curriculum planning. Interviewees, somewhat paradoxically in light of their negativity regarding school music, greatly enjoyed interacting with children. Moreover, they wanted to trial their pedagogical abilities. Interactive experiences were valued above other aspects of the course.

> We did go to the Junior Royal Northern and the lecturers brought in some pupils for us to work with, but I think a bit more hands-on experience with pupils would help. There is nothing quite like getting your hands dirty, and getting in there and trying it out for yourself. . . . they [i.e. the college] could do that more, or send us out into a school a bit more. (Michael)

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> Teacher shadowing was really useful. You could see what other people do and you could, kind of, learn from that and find out what works. More practically based stuff would improve the pedagogy course. (Kirsty)

> I got to go to a music service. We got to follow a peripatetic [instrumental] teacher around [his or her schools]. I found that brilliant . . . I think actively being involved in teaching has to be more central to the pedagogy course. (Simon)

Our interviewees had clearly valued teacher shadowing. These remarks were reinforced when students reflected on the unfavourable aspects of the course. Criticisms typically related to the series of cross-college lectures given in Year 2.

> The boring part of the course is when you sit in a massive group and there's one guy in the middle who talks for an hour and a half. You sit there taking a few notes. . . . He just tells us what to do . . . Some people in that class didn't bother going because they didn't enjoy it. . . . I think it [i.e. the pedagogy course] needs to be more interactive with the pupils rather than one person showing clips on the projector. (Dean)

> There was a lot of just sitting there and listening. *But* they did bring some primary school pupils in for two of our lectures. We took it in turns to teach so that was good. It was useful, I think. I think that sort of thing should be more central to the course. The majority of the lectures were just [a person] talking about teaching and general things. We didn't get that much of a chance to go and do it. (Rachael)

Discussion

Our younger respondents had strong occupational aspirations directed towards performing: Fig. 4 is a summary of findings. The feasibility of extending the range of studies undertaken at a conservatoire has been discussed by Kite (1990). Kite recognised that, at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama:

> The main priority for a conservatory has to be performance: that is how we select our students and how, finally, we evaluate them. It is also fundamental to the students' expectations (p. 226).

The same seems accurate of the RNCM. In our interviewees' minds, the spotlight of conservatoire provision shines intensely on performance, with universities offering a broader range of musical studies. There is a joint course with Manchester University that combines both worlds but, with 12 inductees in 2005 (who will participate in various RNCM faculties), this is a small anomaly. The supposed division between institutions, as understood by undergraduates, makes problematical the college's intentions of preparation for a 'portfolio career'. Furthermore, that pedagogy is characterised as a 'supporting study' implies its rather subordinate position. After all, this is a major vocational pathway for graduates. For our interviewees in Year 2 and above, pedagogy had greater significance, it seemed, yet there are perhaps more barriers to extending curricula. For woodwind and brass teachers employed in conservatoires, the disappearance of graduate diplomas in preference to more expansive Bachelor of Music degrees can be seen 'as providing a wider [. . .] educational base, or [alternatively] as diluting the intensely practical [. . .] necessities of studying an instrument' (Purser, 2005: 290).

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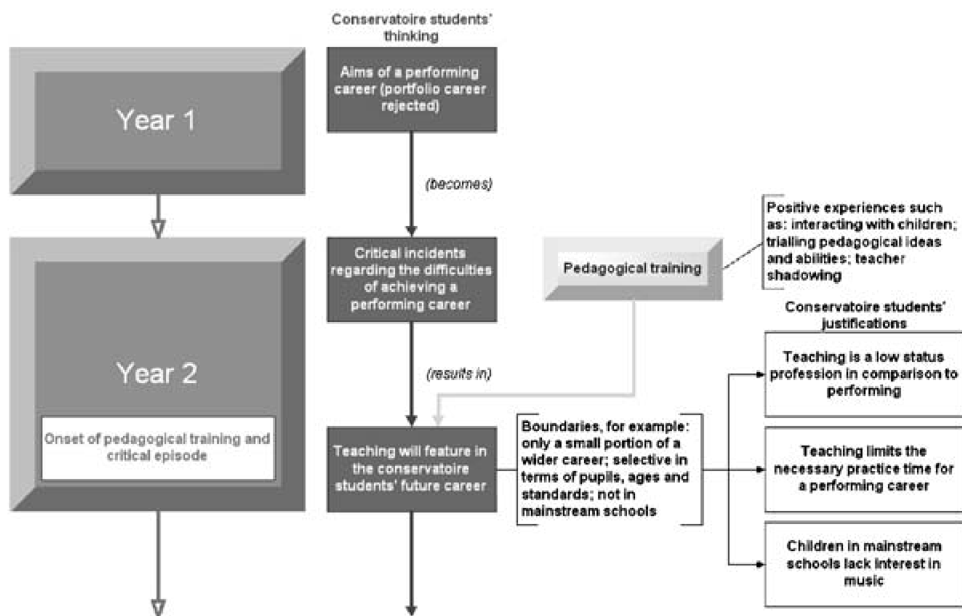

Fig. 4 Summary of findings.

Since the 1980s, university-validated degree systems in conservatoires have eroded the division between universities and the former whose erstwhile concern was performance (Odam & Bannan, 2005: 16). Gaunt (2005b) writes that 21st century working patterns will require adaptability, teaching abilities and leadership skills whereas full-time orchestral playing 'is becoming less and less of a realistic possibility' (p. 322). Purcell (2005) argues that cultural stability cannot be expected in a multicultural world that 'vies with, absorbs and rapidly transforms local and ancient traditions' (p. 227); consequently, music students cannot predict their career paths and conservatoires must redefine their identities. An interesting project would be to collect accurate data on the number of conservatoire graduates who make the greater part of their income, or sole income from performing within Western classical tenets. Are conservatoire degree programmes and realistic career opportunities odd bedfellows?

For conservatoires to engage their students fully in preparation for a varied career, boundaries between performance and other spheres of musical study must be transcended. Future research might explore the extent to which this is an international phenomenon. Indeed, on music in Austrian higher education, Mark (1998) writes of 'historically and institutionally conditioned barriers between the disciplines' (p. 19). Reassuringly, we unearthed a critical episode with the introduction of pedagogical training in Year 2. The undergraduates became more receptive to a future role in education. There was also a desire for increased levels of hands-on experience. Strong links developed between the RNCM and the music services of adjacent boroughs such as Bolton, Stockport and Salford are highly beneficial, therefore. The service in Salford presently employs 10 graduates from the School

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of Wind and Percussion. It seems right to question the amount of teacher shadowing that occurs, however. Typically, the undergraduates experience only two observation sessions of between two and four hours. Undergraduates also placed unrealistic restrictions, we felt, on how teaching might feature in their career; this might best be addressed through further experience. Mills (2005) found that antipathy to secondary class teaching was remedied by experience of a Students' Associates Scheme, which involved Royal College of Music students working alongside class teachers.

In March 2005, the RNCM was awarded a substantial grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England to become a recognised Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). This has major implications: one of three specialist areas chosen for development is the training of specialist instrumental teachers. A centre for young musicians will be established, and a junior wind and percussion project forged in partnership with local music services. Perhaps the SWP should continue to move resolutely in the direction of engaging students in practical experience with children. This bearing could also embrace planning and implementing music lessons in accordance with National Curriculum directives and Federation of Music Services guidelines (FMS, NAME & RCM, 2002). The intention of the latter is to provide 'a framework for a broad and balanced curriculum' (p. 3). This would be especially helpful for graduates who become class music teachers or instrumental specialists in schools. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 2002) noted that good instrumental teachers 'know how to set their teaching into the broader context of pupils' music learning, including the National Curriculum' (p. 4).

Our research served as an interesting exploratory study, which opened a window on SWP undergraduates' training and career aims. It provided a useful insider's perspective which could inform curriculum planning within the faculty. At the start of this article, we stated that findings from such a small sample (whilst representative of the faculty) cannot be generalised more widely. The study does raise questions, even so, and bids further exploration. A future biographical investigation of conservatoire students could explore a larger cohort, cover a wider range of issues and produce a finer-grained analysis of the identity shifts across training. Those who administer and teach in conservatoires should 'review their philosophy, purpose and place in the wider world of higher education' (Odam & Bannan, 2005: 16). It seems reasonable to state that conservatoires should – as an ongoing process – look at the relationship between students' aspirations, their programmes and the vocational world of music.

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