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Journal article

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This is the author's accepted version of the article published as: Boyle, K. (2023). Students as teachers: A study of UK undergraduate music students' experiences and perceptions of instrumental and singing teaching. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14740222231213974>

# **Students as teachers: A study of UK undergraduate music students' experiences and perceptions of instrumental and singing teaching**

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## **Abstract**

This research, carried out between 2020 and 2021, involves an online questionnaire and individual interviews with undergraduate music students at universities and conservatoires in the UK, to examine student experiences of receiving and delivering instrumental and singing tuition. There is no regulation of instrumental teaching in the UK, and individuals are able to teach without formal training or qualification. Existing literature suggests that musicians often begin teaching while still in education, though there is limited research concerning the experience of this process. This research confirms that students are involved in delivering instrumental and singing lessons before and during their undergraduate studies, often beginning with peer learning initiatives in school or 'helping' family and friends. The study identifies positive perceptions of the role of teaching in portfolio careers in music and highlights the influence of both instrumental teachers and classroom music teachers in shaping understandings and providing guidance and opportunities for students.

**Keywords** *Instrumental teaching, possible selves, undergraduate students, university, conservatoire, music careers.*

## **Introduction**

The aim of this study is to enhance understandings of routes into instrumental teaching by exploring the experiences and perceptions of students involved in undergraduate music programmes in the UK. Instrumental and singing teachers working in the UK are able to begin teaching with little or no formal training or guidance, and existing research suggests that it is not uncommon for undergraduate students to be providing tuition (Boyle, 2018; Haddon, 2009; Mills, 2004). Understanding early experiences of teaching and perceptions of the role of instrumental teaching in professional careers can help further understandings of the culture of instrumental teaching and learning in the UK, and inform existing approaches to career preparation and employability for musicians.

Music is taught in UK schools until year 9 (approximate age 14). GCSE music is an option in most secondary schools for 15 to 16 year olds, and from 16 to 18 (Further Education or FE, also referred to as *Sixth Form*) students are able to take A (Advanced) level or alternative BTEC music qualifications. Students can enter Higher Education (HE) as undergraduates at the age of 18, and those wishing to study music at undergraduate level can choose to attend either a university or a conservatoire. The decision to attend either a conservatoire or university can be determined by perceptions of practical skill and also by individual career goals and

expectations since the broad focus of conservatoire education is to provide advanced practical training for highly skilled instrumentalists aiming for careers in performance, while universities offer opportunities to study a wider range of subject areas within music which might be used for a variety of roles within the industry.

There are currently 160 universities in the UK offering programmes in music. University undergraduate degree courses commonly last for 3 years and allow students aged 18 and over to explore various areas of music including solo and ensemble performance, theory, analysis, music history, sound production, music education, music for health and well-being, musicology, music history, music psychology, musical theatre and music management. Entry is usually by qualification (A level/BTEC) and in some cases audition. There are currently 10 Conservatoires in the UK offering courses in performance, popular music, jazz, composition, music technology and musical theatre. Entry is by audition and programmes commonly last for 4 years, providing advanced practical training for instrumental musicians. While there is an increasing focus on the development of a broader range of professional skills in most conservatoires, the focus is largely practical (UCAS Music Course, 2023).

Instrumental tuition is available in a range of contexts in the UK and students of any age can participate in either individual or group lessons in institutional settings such as schools, colleges and conservatoires, and also in extra-curricular contexts including the teacher's home and the student's home (Boyle, 2021; Hallam, 1998; Hallam and Creech, 2010; Mills, 2007). Tuition is also provided in local and regional music centers, commonly run by organizations which provide specialist music tuition such as Music Services or Music Hubs. While students leaving university or conservatoire are required to complete post graduate training to become classroom music teachers, instrumental and singing teachers working in the UK are able to begin teaching with little or no formal training or guidance (Boyle, 2018; Norton et al., 2019) and existing research suggests that some students are involved in delivering tuition while still in formal education (Boyle, 2018; Haddon, 2009; Mills, 2004).

The aim of this study is to explore the way in which undergraduate music students engage with instrumental teaching, both as students and early career teachers. The research questions are:

- (1) to what extent are music students involved in providing instrumental tuition?
- (2) how do students begin teaching?
- (3) how do students develop professional and practical understandings of the role of instrumental teacher?

In the current economic climate, it is more important than ever for Higher Education institutions to support young musicians as they prepare to enter a workforce where the portfolio career represents the dominant model of employment (Bartleet et al., 2019; Bennett, 2016; Hennekam and Bennett, 2017; Latukefu and Ginsborg, 2018).

The combination of Brexit, the 2020 Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the 2022/2023 cost of living crisis have had a significant impact on careers in the music industry, where three quarters of the work force are self-employed (This is Music 2021; UK Music). The impact of Brexit has resulted in increased costs and fewer opportunities for musicians in the UK with

uncertainties around cabotage, carnets, visa and work permit charges. The current study was conducted during the 2020 Covid pandemic restrictions which resulted in the closure of studios, venues and institutions so that musicians were prevented from rehearsing, performing or teaching in person. The *This Is Music 2021* report from UK Music suggested that while Government support schemes were available, many musicians were not eligible due to the self-employed nature of work in this sector. The *This Is Music 2021* findings also suggest that employment in the music industry dropped by 35% from 197,000 in 2019 to 128,000 in 2020 and while the *This Is Music 2022* data shows some recovery in the sector in 2021, the 14% rise in employment to 145,000 jobs in 2021 is still 26% lower than the number of pre-Covid jobs recorded in 2019, suggesting that many of the music industry jobs lost during the pandemic had not returned in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the limitations of flexible, portfolio careers in music where rates of unemployment or underemployment for musicians were exponentially higher than national averages (Canham, 2022; Cohen, 2020; UNESCO, 2020) and the wider economic and societal impact will potentially continue to influence the professional expectations and career options for those involved in the sector (Akkermans et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020).

The portfolio career model adopted by the majority of musicians reflects a precarious and highly competitive field of employment where individuals are required to develop a complex range of professional skills in order to sustain successful and satisfying working lives (Bartleet et al., 2019; Bennet, 2008; Hennekam and Bennet, 2016; Hennekam and Bennett, 2017; Munnely, 2022; Scolere, 2019). Studies have criticized existing approaches to career preparation in universities and conservatoires, suggesting that there still exists a mismatch between student expectations and the reality of precarious careers in music industry (Bennett, 2012, 2016; Bennett and Bridgstock, 2015; Canham, 2022; Gaunt and Westerlund, 2013; Perkins, 2013; Zhukov, 2019). Recent research in this field highlights an urgent need to address career preparation for music students in light of the current climate, suggesting that existing approaches cannot adequately equip individuals for a precarious field of employment which is destabilized and weakened by world events (Canham, 2022; Frenette and Dowd, 2020; Gross and Musgrave, 2020; Hennekam and Bennett, 2017; Whitney et al., 2021).

Instrumental teaching is significant as one of a range of professional roles which musicians necessarily combine to sustain portfolio careers in music (Bartleet et al., 2019; Barton, 2019; Canham, 2022; Norton et al., 2019; Shaw, 2020). Studies of conservatoire students have explored undergraduate perceptions of instrumental teaching as part of musical careers (Blackstone, 2019; Burt-Perkins, 2008; Latukefu and Ginsborg, 2018; Miller and Baker, 2007; Mills, 2004; Shaw, 2020), and the role of teaching as part of the portfolio career (Latukefu and Ginsborg, 2018; Mills, 2004; Miller and Baker, 2007; Shaw, 2020), though there is less focus on these issues from the perspective of undergraduate students participating in music programmes at UK universities. There is also limited research concerning the early experience of delivering instrumental tuition, including the age at which musicians typically start teaching (Norton et al., 2019).

Mills' (2004) study of students at a UK conservatoire suggested that undergraduates were involved in providing instrumental tuition and valued the experience. Similarly, Haddon

(2009) explored the experience of final year university students involved in a range of teaching activities and found that students valued the role and learned to teach through experience. The aim of this study is to build on existing research in this field, along with the author's 2018 study of instrumental teachers which examined routes into instrumental teaching and found that many of the participants began teaching while still in full time education and that students learn to teach through experience with limited training or guidance (Boyle, 2018).

For most musicians, understandings of instrumental teaching as a professional role are developed through interaction with influential teachers who can represent role models or 'possible selves' for aspiring musicians, providing examples of professional roles which help to shape understandings and motivate students to consider specific careers in music (Creech and Papageorgi, 2014; Markus and Nurius, 1986). Research which examines the transition from student to teacher for instrumentalists and singers suggests that, in the absence of formal training or imposed curriculum, individuals develop aspects of the professional role identity of teacher and explore 'provisional selves' as instrumental teachers by adopting and applying understandings acquired during their own tuition (Cohen-Scali, 2003; Creech and Papageorgi, 2014; Ibarra, 1999; Rowley, 2019). The one to one model of instrumental teaching can be regarded as an opportunity for students to acquire specific understandings which they adapt and develop in their own practice as instrumental teachers (Gaunt et al., 2012; Ibarra, 1999).

The experience of teaching while still in education represents a significant stage in the process of becoming a professional musician for the students involved (Ascenso et al., 2019). Exploring these early experiences of teaching can help us to fully understand the way in which musicians learn to teach and potentially inform approaches to training and development to help support undergraduate students as they prepare for professional careers in music (Ascenso et al., 2019; Bennett and Bridgstock, 2015; Shaw, 2020; Whitney et al., 2021). In a 2020 study of conservatoire students, Shaw (2020) highlighted the potential of training and support in preparing students for careers in instrumental teaching, suggesting that conservatoire graduates who had participated in specific pedagogy modules were 'highly employable' and found the work 'rewarding and fulfilling' (Shaw, 2020: 17). Using an online questionnaire and individual interviews, this study explores the development of understandings around instrumental teaching as a source of employment for undergraduate music students and examines the concept of possible selves in relation to approaches to early teaching experiences.

## **Method**

The research used an explanatory sequential design to examine the perceptions and experiences of undergraduate music students attending UK universities and conservatoires. This research design involved the collection and analysis of first quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive stages within the same study (Ivankova et al., 2006). In this study, the quantitative method in the form of an online questionnaire ( $n = 125$ ) was used as the first strand to generate data relating to the broad experience of practice in this context. This was followed by the second, qualitative strand in which 10 student volunteers were interviewed to further explore responses to the questionnaire through the lived experience of individual participants.

The decision to use both an online questionnaire and individual interviews was influenced by the research context. Given the lack of formal regulation and training for the role of instrumental teacher, the combination of questionnaire and individual interviews was employed to allow for exploration of both the broader phenomenon and the individual experience of teaching for students (Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). The questionnaire provides an opportunity for a broader analysis of responses from a range of participants within this community of practice, while the interviews allow for further exploration of perceptions and experiences in this context (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Over a 6-month period, information about the study, including the online questionnaire link was sent to UK universities and conservatoires offering music programmes with an invitation for each institution to participate in the study by sharing the link with undergraduate students. In addition, the link was sent to undergraduate music students at the author's university and the UK Musicians' Union shared the questionnaire with student members. The questions were designed to explore the experience of instrumental teaching for participants along with any teaching experience and perceptions of instrumental teaching as a potential professional role. The questionnaire also featured an invitation for interview volunteers. The interviews were semi-structured, based around emerging themes from the questionnaire and offered an opportunity for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions. The interviews were arranged during the COVID-19 pandemic, and in order to accommodate social distancing measures they were conducted and recorded online. Each interview was transcribed and the transcript verified by the participant.

### *Questionnaire*

In an attempt to maintain anonymity and avoid any sense of bias where the researcher was known to the students in a specific institution, the only participant information gathered in the survey concerned the type of institution and year of study. The questions explored student experiences of instrumental tuition both as pupil and teacher, including the following areas:

- (1) The experience of receiving tuition, including the type of teaching arrangement and number of teachers. (Where participants *had not* received instrumental lessons, they were encouraged to provide details of their experience as an instrumentalist).
- (2) The experience of providing instrumental tuition, including the type of lesson arrangement, how they were initiated, how the student prepared for the lessons and how they felt about the experience.
- (3) Career goals and expectations, including perceptions and understandings of instrumental teaching as a professional role. (Where students *did not* foresee doing any instrumental teaching, the questionnaire asked about their career goals).

### *Individual interviews*

The interviews were semi-structured and featured key prompts reflecting themes from the questionnaire responses. This approach allowed each participant to recount their experience of music education and specifically instrumental tuition. Participants were encouraged to reflect

on their experience of receiving and delivering tuition (where relevant), and their perceptions of teaching as a career option. The broad aim was to explore the lived experience of undergraduate music students by encouraging them to give their own account and share their perceptions.

### *Ethics*

The research proposal was approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the researcher's university and in addition, the project proposal was approved separately by the internal ethics committee at three other participating institutions. Details about the research were sent to departmental staff in universities and conservatoires who acted as informed gatekeepers and agreed to the participation of the students by sharing the project details and survey link internally. Student participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous and participants were provided with explanatory material to ensure informed consent.

Interview participants were given information regarding the type of questions involved beforehand in order to prepare them for the nature of the discussion, and were required to provide written consent. All data was anonymized in order to protect the identity of participants and specific details which might be used to identify participants have been removed.

### *Data analysis*

The survey was created and distributed using Survey Monkey and questions were asked of the data in three main areas using filtering functions available on this platform. These areas related to the experience of receiving instrumental tuition, involvement in teaching activities and the extent to which participants were aware of instrumental teaching as a career option. The responses were filtered to determine the influence of individual experiences of tuition and music education on perceptions of instrumental teaching as a career.

Initial exploration of the interview data involved the identification of broad themes associated with the interview rationale and the research questions. This initial phase of analysis was influential in separating the data into broad thematic areas determined by the experience of receiving and providing instrumental tuition, and perceptions of careers in music. The transcripts were then subjected to further phases of manual coding where similarities were explored in relation to the two broad thematic areas already defined. In order to protect anonymity, the participants were identified using the letter U or C to indicate the type of institution attended and a number.

It is acknowledged that there may be some degree of interest in comparing the experience of conservatoire students and university music students and so, while it is not the primary aim of this article to compare the experience of students in different types of institution, the survey data is filtered to represent both the combined and separate responses from university students and conservatoire students regarding the experience of tuition, experience of teaching and perceptions of teaching as a potential career option.

### *Survey responses*

There were a total of 125 completed responses to the questionnaire, 92 (74.4%) responses from university students and 32 (25.6%) from conservatoire students.

### *Experience of receiving instrumental lessons*

Of the 125 responses, 116 (92.8%) had received instrumental tuition while six university students and two conservatoire students had not. Of the university students, 93.5% (86 students) had received instrumental tuition while 93.7% of conservatoire participants (30 students) had received instrumental tuition.

### *Experience of providing instrumental tuition*

64 students (51.2%) *had* done some teaching themselves with a greater proportion of conservatoire students having experience of teaching. 54% (45 students) of university students suggested that they had done some instrumental teaching, compared with 19 conservatoire participants (70.4% of the conservatoire students). This response was also filtered to determine the experience of students who had not received any tuition themselves. Of eight responses, two students who had *not* received any tuition themselves *had* done some teaching and one had been employed as a workshop leader for a music charity.

Of the students who had experience of teaching, 36.7% (21 participants) suggested that they started out by teaching friends or family members, while 13 students (20.3%) were involved in peer-to-peer lessons in schools. Students also described either becoming an assistant to, or being assigned students by their own instrumental teacher. 47% of students suggested that they had delivered one to one tuition (27 responses) and in some cases a combination of group and individual tuition. In explaining their approach as teachers, 38% of students (22 participants) described using strategies acquired during their own lessons, reproducing approaches to technique and repertoire ideas which had worked for them. The responses also suggested that students used a combination of method books, exam boards repertoire lists, online resources, teaching modules, strategies acquired through observing others and guidance from teachers in their early approaches to teaching.

Student perceptions of teaching were largely positive, and participants suggested that they enjoyed the experience of helping others, finding the teaching experience enjoyable and enriching. While some students expressed satisfaction and confidence in their teaching, others described a lack of confidence in their ability and three participants suggested that they enjoyed the teaching but wouldn't want this to be their only job. Students also expressed a need to gain more experience, and in some cases, suggested they would like to participate in further training to develop greater confidence.

Where students had not done any teaching, 79% (42 responses) suggested that this was because they had not had an opportunity, though there was some confusion around formal and informal understandings of teaching where students had given lessons in school and to friends but described these as 'helping' rather than providing tuition. Understandings of instrumental teaching as a specifically formal arrangement may therefore mean that more students in the study had been involved in providing tuition for peers or helping friends and family members. While some individuals referred to these as early teaching experiences, other participants did not recognise peer to peer tuition or providing lessons for friends and family members as formal teaching situations due to the perceived informal nature of the arrangement.



### *Career goals*

52% of participants ( $n = 65$ ) suggested that they considered instrumental teaching as a career option though the filtering revealed a greater proportion of university students (70.4%) compared with conservatoire students (65%). On the whole, conservatoire students were more prone to identify performance career goals, and acknowledge a portfolio model approach where performance and teaching were both anticipated. University student responses indicated a more diverse approach to career planning with a range of roles including sound production, engineer, music therapy, event management and administration in addition to teaching and performance. Responses also demonstrated significant understandings of contemporary careers for musicians, as participants detailed the various roles they would ideally like to combine as part of a portfolio career, describing teaching as a necessity and *'essential to make a viable career'*. In some cases, students acknowledged the financial stability offered by teaching and described tuition as a *'fall back'* which could be used *'where necessary'* to supplement and support other professional interests and aims. The majority of participants suggested that they were either quite likely or very likely to teach, describing teaching as *'like bread and butter really'*, and conservatoire students were generally more confident in their ability to acquire teaching. While participants described teaching as *'inevitable'* and *'necessary'*, this was commonly as a *'part-time'* or *'on the side'* activity to support other goals and interests. The responses therefore highlight student perceptions of instrumental tuition as *'a useful skill'* for musicians which can potentially provide *'a stable income source'*.

### *Summary of interview findings*

A total of 10 undergraduate students volunteered as interview participants; two first year undergraduates, 5 second year and 3 third year. Two of the participants were second year conservatoire students and eight were university students. Of the eight participants who attended universities, seven were studying on BA Music programmes and one BA in Commercial Music. The aim of the interviews was to explore the experience of receiving and delivering instrumental tuition from the perspective of undergraduate students by examining the key areas of interest in the questionnaire in more detail. The analysis revealed key themes across the interviews relating to the experience of receiving instrumental tuition, the experience of providing tuition, early experiences of teaching and perceptions of teaching as a possible career option.

### *Experience of receiving instrumental tuition as a student*

The most significant themes identified in this area relate to the experience of receiving tuition and the influence of both instrumental teachers and school music teachers in providing support, guidance and opportunities for students.

Six of the 10 interview participants started off in small group tuition at school on at least one instrument, progressing to individual tuition either they transitioned to secondary school or developed more advanced skills. The perceived benefit of individual tuition is reinforced across the interviews where participants were offered one-to-one lessons or advised to transfer to this

format in recognition of their potential. This corresponds with the questionnaire findings in which 27 students (23% of those who had received tuition) had started out in group tuition and progressed to individual lessons. Decisions around the type of tuition were commonly made by parents or teachers, often based on perceived progress and ability. The role of parents in supporting and encouraging students is represented across all interviews, especially in the early stages of tuition, while the influence of both instrumental teachers and school or college music teachers becomes increasingly dominant from secondary school age onwards (age 11 and over).

#### *Influence of the instrumental teacher*

Instrumental teachers were represented as key figures in most interviews, acting as a specialist teacher and professional role model for the student, and shaping understandings of progression by identifying and providing opportunities in music. Participants described being aware of their instrumental teachers' participation in a range of other professional activities, including solo performance and ensemble direction and, in some cases, being inspired by these professional activities.

In several interviews, instrumental teachers were portrayed as role-models for potential careers in music and students described being inspired to be a musician by specific individuals and '*wanting to be like them*'. Across the interviews, participants suggested that teachers continued to support them, even when they were no longer receiving tuition, providing career guidance including teaching advice and sharing both teaching and performance opportunities.

#### *Influence of the school music teacher*

School music teachers represented a significant influence on student motivation and career progression for the majority of interviewees, and the impact of secondary school music teachers as role models was especially important for some participants. Secondary school and sixth form music teachers and heads of department were described as influential figures in the majority of interviews, providing support and career guidance for students. This influence was clearly represented in one second year university student's interview as he described the impact of his school music teacher, suggesting that '*everything I want to do and everything I'm interested in is more or less what she has done with her life and everything she's given me access to*' (U5).

#### *Experience of providing tuition*

Nine of the 10 interview participants had been involved in some form of teaching activity. The key themes in this area relate to experiences of peer-to-peer teaching in schools and colleges, helping others and understandings of formal and non-formal teaching arrangements. There are also significant sub-themes related to the practical experience of teaching, including reflections on '*making it up*' and adopting approaches and strategies used by the student's own teacher.

#### *Peer to peer teaching in schools and colleges*

Of the 10 interview participants, seven were involved in providing peer to peer teaching in schools and sixth form colleges. On the whole, these experiences were instigated either by a

school music teacher or instrumental teacher and involved providing individual or small group tuition for younger or less advanced pupils. In several cases, participants were also involved in ensemble direction and delivering support in theory classes, in some cases acting as an assistant to the classroom teacher.

#### *Helping out and perceptions of tuition as formal and informal*

In all cases, the participants had received requests for tuition, often from friends and peers and this represents a common early experience of tuition for the majority of interviewees. These early experiences, often arranged informally, were described as *'helping out'* rather than teaching by participants, highlighting specific understandings of teaching as a formal, paid arrangement. When asked whether she felt that *'helping out'* with some sixth form lessons had prepared her for further teaching opportunities, a third-year university student highlighted these perceptions, suggesting that, *'because it's not been formal, I don't see it as being experience or anything'* (U8).

Some students suggested that they provided peer to peer tuition in return for longer or additional lessons for themselves, while others received payment from their school. Where individuals were involved in helping friends and peers on an individual basis, the arrangement was largely determined by the nature of the relationship.

Perceptions of early teaching activities, including peer-to-peer tuition and providing lessons for friends and family as *'helping'*, were consistently represented in the interviews. The majority of participants were involved in providing this form of tuition but few of them regard these activities as teaching in a formal sense. The relevance of these early opportunities in relation to possible future employment is overlooked on the whole by those involved and in several cases these experiences were relayed only as an afterthought.

#### *Paid employment as an instrumental teacher*

Three of the interview participants were paid for regular instrumental teaching in other private and institutional contexts while they were still in formal education. One second year university student worked as a private piano teacher, providing individual tuition from the age of 12. Having already participated in peer-to-peer tuition at school, U3 began by teaching a neighbor's child and developed a private teaching practice, eventually spending her gap year giving lessons to students of various ages both privately and in schools. When asked how she taught and where her teaching strategies came from, U3 admitted that in the early stages she felt *'out of her depth'* and suggested that she *'learnt how to teach through teaching'*, using her own experience of instrumental tuition as a guide and teaching in the way that she was taught. These reflections are typical across all interviews where participants reflected on feelings and strategies associated with early teaching experiences.

#### *Early experiences of teaching*

In participant accounts of early teaching experiences, there was a marked difference between perceptions of peer-to-peer encounters where the arrangement was established and managed

by school music teachers or instrumental teachers and individual private tuition. The peer arrangement appeared to provide structure and certainty for those involved and the students as teachers were reassured by the presence of an authority figure. One student suggested that the peer-to-peer tuition was easier because *'everything was set up'* by her teacher and she *'knew what she was doing'*, whereas she felt *'lost'* and didn't know how to approach an individual flute lesson with a friend. As a result of the experience, this participant suggested that before giving individual instrumental lessons in the future she would seek out relevant training rather than what she described as *'making it up as I go along'* (U8). Another participant described feeling *'terrified'* and *'pretending she knew what she was doing'* in early lessons with an individual singing student, suggesting that her anxiety related to a fear of doing a bad job and *'damaging the student's voice irrevocably'* (C1).

The notion of *'making it up'* in early teaching encounters was common in these accounts, along with referring to significant learning experiences and specific teachers as models. One participant describes her approach to group singing lessons as *'a big copy and paste of my music teacher at school'* (U7), suggesting that she adopted her own teacher's strategies when teaching and working with groups and ensembles, *'stealing'* her teacher's lesson structures, warm ups and techniques and *'sharing'* those aspects which had worked for her as a student.

#### *Significant influences on teaching*

The influence of previous teachers was clearly conveyed in the interviews as participants described drawing on materials and techniques from their own tuition, and turning to their own instrumental teachers and school music teachers to ask for advice and guidance. This guidance helped to act as a support for some students, while for others it represented a starting point from which they could develop their own teaching strategies.

#### *Benefits associated with teaching*

All of the interview participants recognised teaching as a career option, based on their existing skills, and several identified specific benefits associated with teaching, including improvement in their own communication skills and a sense of satisfaction associated with seeing pupils progress and succeed. Other participants commented on the positive impact on self-esteem and motivation where they felt *'accepted and talented and wanted'* when asked to help out with teaching in school and other institutional settings, and highlighted perceived benefits to their own practice as a result of teaching. One first year university student U2 summarized these perceptions, suggesting that *'there's no better way to test your own knowledge than to explain it to other people. It always reminds me of what you know and what you don't know'*.

#### *Career plans*

In each individual interview, the participants were encouraged to share their career goals, including whether they anticipated being involved in instrumental teaching as a possible professional role. Two main themes emerged, relating to the participants' understandings of

careers in music, including the role of instrumental teaching in musicians' careers, and an awareness of professional networks for musicians as a source of support and employment.

#### *Understandings of portfolio career*

All of the interview participants viewed teaching as one potential role available to them, based on their existing skills. They were aware of teaching as an option, without the need to acquire relevant training or qualifications, and in some cases, they had already identified suitable teaching opportunities which they intended to explore after university or conservatoire. Instrumental teaching was acknowledged as a source of '*reliable income*' and '*security*', and participants described the appeal of having regular private students each week as '*a sort of security*'. While students variously described the advantages of private teaching in terms of '*doing something you're passionate about*' and '*being in charge of your own hours*', the majority recognized a portfolio career model of employment and some acknowledged that teaching might be necessary to support performance ambitions after university and conservatoire.

*'My ultimate career goal is to find that balance between performing and teaching, because realistically, I think just doing the performing isn't a full-time thing that will provide a lot financially, but as I really enjoy the teaching, I don't want to give that up either'* (U7).

These understandings already seem to be embedded in the participants' understandings of careers in music, articulated through their observations of the culture of musicians and the working lives of their own teachers:

*'everyone I know in music is teaching on the side - my new bassoon teacher is very often having to rearrange lessons because of having to fly here, go there, do a Broadway recording there but also because of teaching as well in schools'* (U6)

#### *Awareness of professional networks*

Understandings of musicians' careers were accompanied in the interviews by an awareness of the role of professional networks as a source of support, guidance, teaching and performance work. When asked whether they received any guidance in their preparation for teaching, the participants referred to various sources, including instrumental teachers, classroom music teachers, colleagues and friends and these same contacts were mentioned in relation to possible sources of work after university and conservatoire. When asked how they would source teaching after university, several participants suggested that they would contact their school instrumental teachers, music centre managers or music services to ask about opportunities and one suggested that she would approach other *senior* teachers in the area to ask for their advice.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Given the limited amount of research relating to early experiences of instrumental teaching and specifically students teaching while still in education, this study represents an important contribution to understandings of instrumental teaching in the UK. The study builds on existing

research concerning routes into instrumental teaching (Bartleet et al., 2019; Burt-Perkins, 2008; Gaunt, 2005; Mills, 2004) and confirms that students are teaching both before and during their undergraduate studies and recognise that teaching is something available to them as a career option (Boyle, 2021; Haddon, 2009; Mills, 2004). The majority of participants had received instrumental or singing tuition and these early experiences influenced the decision to teach for some students. In both their early teaching experiences and career expectations, students were influenced by their own instrumental teachers and classroom music teachers and they valued these individuals as part of an emerging network which they were aware of as a potential source of support.

School and sixth form music teachers represented an important source of career guidance and possible selves for students and are clearly influential in shaping notions of progression. School music teachers are also commonly involved in encouraging students to explore provisional selves as teachers by providing peer to peer mentoring opportunities and other teaching responsibilities (Cohen-Scali, 2003; Creech and Papageorgi, 2014). While instrumental teachers are involved in providing possible selves and supporting career preparation, school music teachers appear to be more influential in shaping broader understandings of progression and opportunities for students (Creech and Papageorgi, 2014; Markus and Nurius, 1986).

Peer to peer tuition is significant as an early experience of teaching in the research as participants were asked to help, support or teach other students. These opportunities were initiated by the school music teacher in most cases with instrumental teachers also offering teaching to students and in some situations, individuals were involving in 'helping' friends and peers in HE settings. Beard and Wilson (2013) identify learning by doing or experiential learning as the common method for acquiring skills for musicians, including understandings of professional roles. Peer to peer tuition provides a valuable opportunity for experiential learning where students as teachers are able to prepare for teaching by developing their skills 'in an active way using real-life scenarios' (Claire, 2018: 15). The student experiences represented in this study highlight the nature of experiential learning in instrumental teaching as they were largely involved in asymmetrical peer to peer arrangements where they delivered tuition or support for younger or less capable peers and were able to explore provisional selves as teachers while also providing possible selves for their pupils (Creech et al., 2020). In the absence of formal training and guidance, these experiences represent significant learning opportunities for the students as teachers where they call on their own experience as learners to communicate practical skills to others (Creech et al., 2020; Haddon, 2009).

However, for many participants, these early experiences did not represent formal teaching and students described 'helping out' in peer-to-peer situations rather than teaching, even for those students who were paid for the tuition. These perceptions reflect specific understandings about formal and informal learning in instrumental music which relate to the traditional apprenticeship model of tuition and perceptions of peer-to-peer music making activities (Creech et al., 2020). Folkestad (2006) suggests that in formal learning situations the teacher is involved in planning and directing activities and defining the content of the lessons, while informal situations involve a greater degree of learner autonomy and interaction. The majority of peer-to-peer arrangements featured in this study were asymmetrical and correspond

to Folkestad's (2006) description of formal learning since the student as teacher was involved in directing activities which were defined either by the music teacher or by themselves. The arrangement described by the majority of participants therefore corresponds with a more formal, guided approach which Topping (2005) usefully describes as 'peer assisted learning', reflecting the asymmetrical nature of the relationship and active role of the student as teacher. Perceptions of informality may be influenced by the age, qualifications and inexperience of the students as teachers or to the arrangements being initiated by an authority figure, but these understandings clearly undermine the value and significance of these experiences for the participants.

The students participating in this study seem to have largely realistic and informed employment goals and recognize the portfolio nature of musicians' careers as a positive opportunity to explore a range of ambitions and interests. However, while conservatoire students demonstrated more understanding of musical networks as a source of work on the whole, participants in both the questionnaire and interviews described a lack confidence with regard to entrepreneurial skills. This lack of confidence around the more practical aspects of musicians' careers, along with the study findings relating to participants' experiences of *'making it up'* in early teaching encounters, suggests that while undergraduate students are ambitious and informed about the opportunities available, many are still not adequately prepared for the professional environment when they leave university and conservatoire. Canham (2022) suggests that 'it is only after graduation that most young artists realise the broad range of skills and capabilities they need to establish and sustain their careers' (Canham, 2022: 36). In the current precarious climate for musicians, it is even more important for students to acquire career specific understandings and skills related to being a musician while in university or conservatoire in order to build sustainable careers in music (Ascenso et al., 2019).

This study highlights the experiences and perceptions of undergraduates who are already engaged in instrumental teaching and who are aware of the role of teaching as one option in a portfolio career model of employment. These understandings demonstrate the extent to which students are already embedded in the culture of music and musicians. Universities and conservatoires in the UK can potentially nurture existing interests and goals and enhance student employability by prioritizing the development of essential career skills through practical, industry-based learning opportunities which focus on instrumental teaching (López-Íñiguez and Bennett, 2020; Shaw, 2020). Participation in instrumental teaching can have a positive impact on confidence and self-esteem for the teacher and can also reinforce and enhance existing practical skills. This study recognises early instrumental teaching encounters as opportunities for the development of skills, techniques and understandings which will help students become successful musicians. Ascenso et al. (2019) suggest that peer learning and practice-based programmes, where 'centrality is placed on tacit learning and the search for *becoming*' can support integration into the music profession (Ascenso et al., 2019: 20).

The study therefore recommends further research and development around internships and partnerships where undergraduate students have opportunities to explore provisional selves in the various professional contexts of instrumental teaching in the UK and gain practical

industry-based knowledge prior to entering the workforce. There is also scope for further research around the experience of peer-to-peer instrumental teaching and learning in schools and other settings which could help inform approaches to training for instrumental teachers.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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