You’re a Musician – You Can Teach Composition and Improvisation

Jennifer MacDonald and Karlin Love

There is a significant body of research which validates the inclusion of creative music within the curriculum (Hickey, 2003; Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Wiggins, 2015). There is widespread recognition that our goals in education are to teach our students how to think and learn (McPherson, Davidson & Faulkner, 2012) and to be autonomous lifelong learners (Griffin, 2021). Increasingly the benefits of study in the arts, and specifically in music, are recognised as developing our students as creative thinkers. Curriculum, certainly within Australia, reflects this with the inclusion of creativity within its scope (ACARA, 2010).

Many music educators have considerable experience and expertise in composition and improvisation and are well-equipped to teach creative music, especially those in contemporary/popular music contexts. However, a large body of educators - particularly those trained as classical performers - have gone through their own education, including university studies, with little to no training in creative practice.

This workshop will be led by two educators; a school music teacher and a composer who has worked extensively in schools and in pre-service teacher education. They will focus on experiences of the music teacher who began their career in a country high school in the 1980s and recalls being shocked to discover creative music as a requirement in the curriculum. As a classically trained musician with no creative experience, it was very daunting to know where to start. They did, and were startled by what their students created and how they developed. Since then, creative music-making has been an integral part of their programs, enriching the experience and understanding of music students from diverse backgrounds and abilities, and especially, the performers.

After a brief introduction they will present an approach to teaching creative music, aimed at educators who lack confidence in this area. They will target secondary education, however ideas and tasks will be adaptable to primary. Three creative activities will be presented through practical workshopping and discussion of educational impacts and benefits. Teachers will be able to take these activities into their classrooms and design others to fit their particular cohorts. They will develop further understanding of how to:

* Introduce each task – including learning goals and success criteria
* Scaffold tasks and assist students in developing their creative responses
* Assess tasks

One presenter will lead the in-person workshop assisted by the second, particularly to integrate online participation. Some basic instruments would be useful for the workshop.