

TRANSCRIPT

HigherEd in Practice – Podcast series

EPISODE #3: UPDATING THE MASTER-APPRENTICE MODEL

[MUSIC – Introduction]

Helene Peterbauer

Welcome to HigherEd in Practice, a podcast series from the European University Association. In this series, we introduce you to selected practices in European higher education, covering teacher training and teaching enhancement, well-being, pedagogies and co-creative processes. I'm your host, Helene Peterbauer, and together with some of my colleagues, I sit down with higher education experts to give you insights into practices you might find inspiring, thought provoking, or just interesting. In this episode, I sit down with Deborah Kelleher, the President of the European Association of Conservatoires, to talk about class sizes. Deborah is also the Director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin, and shares her insights on what very small classes, sometimes even just consisting of a student and a teacher, can mean for the choice of pedagogies.

Helene Peterbauer

Deborah, thanks so much for meeting me today. I know you are quite busy as the director of the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM). Could you tell us a little bit more about RIAM to start off the interview?

Deborah Kelleher

Yes. RIAM is the national conservatoire for music in Ireland. We teach predominantly classical music. As a conservatoire our foundation and make up is actually quite unique. We have quite a large pre-college division of about 1800 school aged students, and then we have students at bachelor's, master's and doctoral level, all of whom are working on music performance or creation, as in composition and also music pedagogy. We're an associate college of Trinity College Dublin, and this year we're celebrating our 175th anniversary. So, we've really shaped musical life in Ireland for almost 200 years.

Helene Peterbauer

Wow, that's good to hear. And Deborah, on top of your position at RIAM, you are also the President of the AEC, the European Association of Conservatoires. Is that correct?

Deborah Kelleher

That's correct. I was elected President last November and this is a wonderful organisation. This is a fully global network organisation of over 300 music conservatoires, some of whom also teach the wider performing arts. Predominantly, our members come from Europe, but we've also recently had new membership, both from Asia and from America. This is an organisation whose primary purpose is networking and connecting members to each other, so that we can learn from each other and share good practice. It also has a very strong advocacy role, so we would very regularly lobby the EU, and when required, the national governments of our members to try and improve the situation of higher music education in general. But we're also somewhat of a think tank. So recently, for instance, we got significant EU funding for a project which we call ARTEMIS - Empowering Artists as Makers in Society, and in that we have working groups working on things like what is the impact of digitization in higher music education, and what is our response to climate change? How can we build capacity in our institutions to future proof them against changes? And of course, things like what is the impact that AI will have on the future of higher music education? So, this is a very busy and robust membership organisation. And I have to say, it's a privilege for me to lead it. And I learn as much as I give, that's for sure.

Helene Peterbauer

Okay. Understood. All very interesting activities indeed. Now, Deborah, you are here today to talk to us about music schools and their pedagogies. And my understanding is that music schools typically deliver education to rather small groups, with individualized approaches. Is that also the case with your academy, with RIAM, or how would you generally describe your Academy's approach to learning and teaching?

Deborah Kelleher

Yes, a music conservatoire and a music academy has a varied approach to how we teach. However, it is founded on one basis, which is the master-apprentice model. So in a music conservatory, traditionally, since they were founded about 250 years ago, it's always based on a master musician, such as a violinist or a singer, or a pianist who teaches in the 1 to 1 teaching format to a student. In our case, it's two hours per week, 1 to 1 with a student, and they pass on their knowledge. Very often the student will be with the same master teacher for four years of their bachelor's degree, for instance. Now, in recent times, the master-apprentice model has undergone some changes. The first change that would happen is that occasionally we have team teaching, which means that instead of one teacher, you might have two. You could also change your teacher. Maybe you'd have the same teacher in first and second year, but change to a different teacher in third year and fourth year. We've also introduced small group classes, so you might have your 1 to 1 lesson, but then also once a week you'd be in a group of 2 to 3 of your peers with a teacher. This would change the dynamic, because we would be looking to ask the peers to themselves give feedback to the performer who's playing. So, what you're getting there is a different type of feedback and criticism, which is led and facilitated by the teacher as a coach – rather than the 1 to 1 where the master would be giving their knowledge and expecting the student to almost try and recreate it. Even within the 1 to 1 master-apprentice model, we're very conscious that the recreation of one master musician's ideas doesn't, in fact, encourage

independent learning. So what we work with our teachers through continuing professional development is to ask more questions of the students, to try and give the student more autonomy, to try and help them have the confidence to select their own repertoire, to make their own artistic decisions. So, I would be seeing in the music conservatoire format that the master-apprentice model itself is shifting to be perhaps more student centred rather than master centred. Also, by loosening out the 1 to 1 to small group with a teacher that this facilitative, more general feedback experience is also a different dimension and something that I think is very exciting.

Helene Peterbauer

Yes, I can imagine. This does really sound like an interesting twist on the typical master-apprentice model. Are there any other lessons learned from experimenting with teaching approaches for smaller to very small groups of students? Perhaps something that could be picked up by other disciplines, or maybe other types of institutions?

Deborah Kelleher

Yes. I think one of the things that we came late to is when we were engaging in small group teaching, our teachers initially just kept up almost a master class demeanor, meaning that the teacher would teach the student and the two other students in the room would merely sit and observe and wouldn't engage. Early on, we identified that that was pretty boring for the students because all they were doing was listening in a passive way. By training our teachers to ask more active questions, by asking the students themselves to prepare some questions, or to listen in advance to the music that was going to be played. So, by planning the repertoire more in advance, we found that we had richer conversations and our students went from being passive observers to people who were genuinely contributing to their peer's experience and also themselves learning because they were more engaged. One of the lessons we learned early on was that we did have to train our students and our staff in giving constructive and useful feedback, because in the early days, the feedback could be quite subjective, sometimes unconstructive, sometimes uninformed, and it wasn't really bringing the student's experience on in any way. So, by working with more performance psychologists than musicians, and coaches more than musicians, we found a way in which we would try and have the students and the teachers as equal partners in the lesson, and that was a big difference that we had.

Helene Peterbauer

So, Deborah, for now, we have been talking about and learned also quite a lot of interesting things about the advantages and unique benefits of small classrooms. And now my interest is in the other side. Are there perhaps some pedagogies, approaches or practices which you see are not possible in academies like yours, but which you would otherwise like to implement?

Deborah Kelleher

We do have large classes, and we are fascinated when we look at business schools, for instance, where you might have 400 students in a room with a lecturer. That fascinates us because, to be honest, Helene, it is expensive to teach conservatoire students because the 1 to 1 teaching method is so expensive. One thing that is a lesson that we've learned in the Academy is that you perhaps don't

need to teach so many hours of 1 to 1 if you're teaching the student how to learn independently themselves. It can be a wasteful experience if the student is recreating too much what the teacher is playing, because then the student is wholly reliant on the teacher's musical ideas. What I like about the concept of large classrooms is that a lecturer in a business school who lectures to 400 students cannot individually go round the students and check that they're doing their work on a weekly or daily basis. Those students are conditioned and taught to learn independently and to research independently. Even though our classes are small, we're taking that principle and saying, we want you to be independent learners. We want you to continue to learn after college and not just feel bereft because there's nobody playing what you should recreate. That level of independence means that we hope, like a business student, that they will endeavour to continue to learn and innovate and research long after their weekly 1 to 1 lessons.

Helene Peterbauer

All right. Thank you so much, Deborah. Now, you already gave us a hint to what I would like to address with my next question. But to give our listeners the full picture, would you still have any additional insights on commonalities between the pedagogical needs or challenges at music academies on one side and other higher education institutions on the other side? And of course, we would also be interested in hearing how these challenges can be addressed.

Deborah Kelleher

One of the biggest challenges that we find pedagogically is that the music profession and the industry of music is moving in very new and innovative directions, whereas our staff would be grounded in perhaps what could be quite a conservative tradition. Sometimes music conservatoires are following behind what the industry is doing. When I look at universities and I look at their impressive research and development, I see a more forward looking and innovative principle. They are usually informing industry rather than following industry. Now this really excites me. So actually in RIAM we have the idea to form a research institute that does exactly what the university does - that actually innovates, looks around corners for the future of music, and has our staff and students researching that. I think where music academies can learn most from universities is the position they have at the forefront of innovation. A music conservatoire I would almost wish to rename as '*innovatoires*' to focus on innovation more than conservation. That would be my big dream for the conservatoire sector.

Helene Peterbauer

Well, music *innovatoire* certainly sounds catchy and like an inviting concept. Deborah, this was a really interesting and insightful conversation. Thank you for meeting me today.

[MUSIC – Outro]

Helene Peterbauer

Thank you for listening to this third episode of our HigherEd in Practice series. If you would like to know more about the Royal Irish Academy of Music or the work of the European Association of

Conservatoires, have a look at the links in the show notes. In our fourth and final episode next month. My colleague Maria Kelo talks to Frederik De Decker from Ghent University in Belgium about how the institution collaborates with non-university partners in a way that links learning and teaching with service to society. If you don't want to miss it, make sure to subscribe to our podcast.