A collaborative model for musicians’ occupational health education at tertiary level in South Africa, with emphasis on the role of Body Mapping in the somatic education component

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Professional and student musicians are at risk of experiencing physical and psychological strain and injury that are directly related to their music-making, and research shows that occupational health education for tertiary level musicians is beneficial. Internationally many institutions are incorporating preventative programmes, however there are no courses in musicians’ health offered in any of the music departments of South African universities.

The purpose of this presentation is to explore a collaborative model for musicians’ occupational health education based on work done by Judy Palac, and to demonstrate how this framework could be applicable at tertiary institutions in South Africa. Particular emphasis will be placed on the role of Body Mapping in the somatic education component.

A literature study of scholarly articles outlining the background of musicians’ occupation-related health problems, including examples of, and recommendations for, preventative health programmes offered at music schools internationally, is followed by an investigation of the South African context.

A descriptive in-depth analysis, with reference to research, elaborates and substantiates the three components of Palac’s collaborative model:

1. Medical professionals diagnose and treat musicians with music-related physical or psychological disorders;
2. Music teachers provide pedagogy that is founded on sound musical, psychological and biomechanical principles;
3. Movement and somatic specialists provide knowledge of the body in music making (Palac 2008).
Movement and somatic specialists

Body Mapping for musicians, Alexander Technique, Pilates, Feldenkrais Method, and others, provide knowledge of the body in music making.

Somatic education classes teach more efficient sensorimotor integration skills and enable connection of artistic process with effective body awareness.

Musicians’ posture and movement awareness and training is an integral part of health promotion, injury prevention, performance enhancement and improved musicianship. Music education students should acquire these skills during their training to be able to integrate into their teaching.

Body Mapping for musicians (BMG)

- One of the more recent somatic methods, and designed specifically for musicians.
- Applies relevant structural anatomy to playing an instrument and singing.
- Aims to help prevent and treat injury and to improve performance.
- Vision of a secure somatic foundation for music education (Barbara Conable).
- Neural maps guide body movements, and are also dependent on sensorimotor experiences.
- Process of BMG: To question one’s own often unconscious conceptions of how one’s body is structured and how correcting inaccurate maps improves facility, ease and efficiency of playing or singing.
- Development of sensorimotor skills includes training of kinaesthetic sensitivity and refining the use of tactile, auditory, and visual senses in the context of whole body awareness.
- Integration of the senses leads to an inclusive awareness of the whole body in relation to the surrounding environment.
- Efficient whole body use in a flexible and coordinated way.
- Enhances performance with both physical and technical fluidity and ease.
- Combining musical intention with a clear movement intention, further develops bodily connectedness, appropriate movement, expression, and improved artistry.

CONCLUSIONS

- Establishes that Palac’s collaborative model provides a flexible structure that is viable in the South African tertiary context.
- Highlights the crucial need for musicians’ occupational health education at tertiary level.
- Outlines the core content of tertiary musicians’ occupational health educational programmes.
- Emphasises the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Demonstrates that Body Mapping is a practical and effective way to provide knowledge of the body in music making, to teach more efficient sensorimotor integration skills, and to enable the connection of the artistic process with effective movement and body awareness.
- Shows that heightened awareness of musicians’ occupational health in university settings would promote research and increase knowledge among medical practitioners.
• Recommends the establishment of a South African affiliation body of performing arts health professionals from both the medical and the performing arts fields, to facilitate interdisciplinary research, training, collaboration and conferences.

• Economic considerations in a developing country raise challenges in tertiary education, yet Palac’s model provides a practical and cost-effective framework that builds on the existing resources at a university, utilises interdepartmental collaboration and local healthcare providers, and increases knowledge and awareness of Performing Arts Medicine.

KEY REFERENCES


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BIOGRAPHY

Bridget Rennie-Salonen lectures part-time at the South African College of Music at the University of Cape Town, is active as a freelance flautist and teaches privately. She is a licensed Andover Educator and is currently pursuing PhD research on ‘Student musicians’ experiences of an occupational health course based on the Body Mapping approach’. As the former Solo Principal Flute of the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra, Bridget was the recipient of the prestigious Carklin Award for Artistic Excellence. Also a Fiesta Award and Standard Bank Silver Ovation Award winner, Bridget is highly regarded as a solo, chamber and principal orchestral flautist, and has appeared as soloist with several South African orchestras.