
Interview Report with Music Educator Practitioner in the Community

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Interview Report with a Private Instrumental Instructor

For this assignment, I interviewed Lilac Toh, who is a B.Mus and B.Ed graduate of Queen's University and recently created her own studio offering piano, clarinet and theory lessons.

Interview Methodology

I set up the interview by messaging Lilac through social media as I met her through the Concurrent Education program at Queen's University, and we had previously communicated on social media before. Once I organized my own material such as questions to ask and tested my method of recording, we arranged a time to have the interview. We agreed to meet over Zoom on Saturday, March 5, 2022. I used Zoom to record the meeting as well as create a live transcript of the interview.

Summary of Main Findings

Lilac's Music Studio was created as a space for Lilac to call her own and return to teaching piano, which she loves and enjoys. The decision to open a studio was also influenced by the uncertainty of what would happen once her Bachelor of Education program was complete. Some important elements that Lilac recommends considering include; deciding the type of instrument to teach, the curriculum taught in lessons, as well as the format of lessons such as

individual or group lessons. She explains that setting up clear expectations and policies create a clear understanding between the instructor and students. The use of social media and general advertisement sites were useful for reaching potential students.

Education systems and educators cannot prepare its students for everything they will encounter once they leave the program. Lilac highlights that while there are things that school cannot teach, there are many experiences that her education has provided her that could be applied to studio teaching. The Concurrent Education program at Queen's provides its students with practicums, where students enter classrooms under the supervision of a host teacher and learn through practical experiences. Lilac points to these experiences as vital, and that these skills can be applied to both classrooms as well as studios.

Lilac is specialized in teaching Grade 1-8 RCM equivalent curriculum. She uses the Alfred series as there is both a children and adult syllabus. The series is organized nicely into appropriate levels for beginner pianists. Another syllabus that she uses is the Faber series, which includes several different genres such as pop, Latin, and jazz. Lilac explains her experience with one student who brings in music they want to learn, which is often found online. Music found online can often be missing markings such as fingering, dynamics, articulation and tempo which are all things she tries to add to the piece with the collaboration of her student.

Online lessons are a helpful way to reach a larger spread of students. Instructors can teach in different time zones with the help of technology, but at the same time technology can be difficult and inaccessible to some students. One of the challenges for teachers is to be able to adapt to these situations by having a thorough understanding of the online tools to connect with students such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams. Lilac tackled the challenge of being proficient at these different online tools by using them in real time and learning from her experiences. She also practiced by calling housemates before lessons and presentations and trying out the different features on these platforms.

Since opening her studio, Lilac has interacted with caregivers of students. She keeps up communication through weekly emails describing the student's learning and what is expected for their next lesson. These weekly email reports ensure that the caregiver, student, and teacher are on the same page about the student's progress. It also allows the caregiver to understand what their child should be working on at home if they want to help with practice. It is important to keep

caregivers involved in their children's education. However, Lilac believes that the caregiver's involvement should be left at clear communication and not into the responsibilities of the teacher. She believes that the teaching needs to be left to the teacher and when caregivers cross into this territory, it becomes somewhat uncomfortable for the teacher. Lilac also points out that it is even more important for her to set these boundaries and be strict with them as a young educator. An ideal situation would be one where caregivers show interest in their child's learning and ask the teacher how they can help without overstepping boundaries. Lilac finds that when caregivers inquire about how to help their child and are in the loop about the material their child is learning, the student's progress and improvement are evident even over a short period of time.

Reflections on this Assignment

I found this experience very educational and interesting. It was interesting to hear about the experiences that Lilac has had with studio teaching as well as her thoughts on the balance between parents and teachers involved in a child's education. Lilac had similar views as some teachers mentioned in Ang's (2020) article in which they themselves are the experts and expect co-operation from parents through communication. However, after hearing Lilac's perspective, I think I have a deeper understanding for why teachers feel this way. It can be problematic if parents do try to push a challenging piece for their child, and I think keeping a boundary for the involvement of parents in teaching could be beneficial to the child in these situations.

References

Ang K, Panebianco C, and Odendaal A (2020). Parent-teacher partnerships in group music lessons: a collective case study. *British Journal of Music Education* 37, 169–179.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S026505171900024X>