

1. Title of Research & Acknowledgement of Support

Slí an Cheoil – Experiencing Irish Traditional Music in Post-Primary Music Education

2. Name of Researcher

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3. Date

Tuesday 3rd May 2011

4. Timeframe including details of when the research was carried out

Teacher Interviews and Project Planning	May - Aug 2009
Classroom-based Recording & Observations:	Sep - Dec 2009
Slí an Cheoil final concert	Dec 2009
Lesson Observation Critical Incident Technique:	Apr - May 2010
Grounded Theory Analysis	Jul - Sep 2010

5. Brief outline of research idea

The title of the research project was *Slí an Cheoil - Experiencing Irish Traditional music in Post Primary Music Education*. The project had as its broad subject, 'the experience' of Irish traditional music by music teachers and students in the context of the Post-Primary Music Curriculum. The subject of this study was the processes of transmission of Irish traditional music within the music classroom, and the attitudes, perceptions and specific practices of participants, namely teachers and students, in their approach to this particular musical genre in this educational setting.

While the primarily aural, oral, non-literacy, and informal nature of the processes of transmission within the tradition have been widely referred to (Veblen 1995; McCarthy 1999; Vallely 1999; Smith 2005; O' Shea 2008; Ó Dubhthaigh 2009; O' Flynn 2009), gaining an understanding of how aural transmission and learning actually occurs in the formal educational context of the post-primary music classroom and the potential that exists has received considerably less attention. This in turn has led to many questions existing around the concept of realising "authentic musical traditions in context" within these educational contexts. It is hoped that what has emerged from this research will better our understanding of where Irish traditional music lies in this educational context, highlight the potential that exists to redress the experiential dichotomy that exists between classroom and community contexts, and provide music teachers with a pedagogical insight towards achieving an optimum experience of the tradition in the classroom.

6. Summary of the research aims

The overarching aim and objective of this project was to investigate the experience of Irish traditional music by music teachers and students in the context of the post-primary music curriculum in Ireland, and to investigate the pedagogical processes by which an optimum experience of Irish traditional music can be achieved in this formal educational context.

To investigate the dichotomy that exists between a pedagogy and language based within an aural tradition and that of western art music pedagogy, and to investigate the potential of realising authentic traditions in context within the post-primary music classroom.

To collaborate with two music teachers from non-traditional music backgrounds to design an action research project which would provide experiences in Irish traditional music to post-primary music students over the course of a longitudinal study (16 weeks), and to then record and observe these classes over this period

To gain an understanding of how aural transmission and informal learning occurs in the formal educational context of the post-primary music classroom. To teach each music teacher to play tin-whistle 'by ear' in one-to-one music lessons, and observe and record each music teacher as they teach their music classes to play 'by ear' over the course of the project.

To investigate the interaction and relationships between learner and teacher in terms of taking responsibility of the learning experience

To investigate the role of the visiting musician in providing experiences in Irish traditional music in this context

To conceptualise through the *Lesson Observation Critical Incident Technique* and grounded theory analysis, a paradigm of optimum experience for Irish traditional music in this formal educational context

7. Outline of methodology used including details of how any ethical considerations were addressed

A methodological design using an integrated action research and grounded theory approach was deemed appropriate for the classroom-based element of this study, and this brought overlapping but different strengths to the research. The rationale for using this integrated approach is explained further below but at this stage, it could be said that where action research methodology was the primary guiding methodology for the study, grounded theory methodology was the primary analytical tool for the data which emerged through the action research process. The *Lesson Observation Critical Incident Technique* developed by Professor Do Coyle, Professor in Learning Innovation at the School of Education, University of Aberdeen was also used within this qualitative methodological framework. In brief, through LOCIT, several recorded classes were chosen by each music teacher at the end of the study as having 'positive learning moments' for both teacher

and students. Each teacher then watched and reviewed these recorded classes with their students, who were asked to identify their own learning moments. I then facilitated discussions between teacher and students to capture when and why these learning moments occurred. According to Coyle (2010), 'the LOCIT process puts learning at the heart of what we do. It encourages everyone involved – teachers, learners, student teachers, teacher educators and researchers – to work together to capture when and why learning moments happen'. In this case, LOCIT was used as an additional tool to capture positive learning moments in Irish traditional music, moments which held meaning and value to both teacher and students.

The action research methodology used in this research can be viewed as a 'small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention' (Cohen and Manion 1994, p. 186) and as such, action research is often considered in conjunction with educational aims. The self-reflective spiral, or cyclical process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting which is integral to an action research design (Cohen and Manion 1994, p. 304) allowed for a thorough investigation into the experience of Irish traditional music in this educational context. For example, I met with each music teacher on a regular basis over the course of the project to discuss and plan each class for implementation the coming week, and the teacher would then teach the class (on occasion I would participate in leading these classes in my role as participant-as-observer). I would video record each class for observation, and both I and the teacher would reflect on each class afterwards by making notes and holding informal conversations as the project proceeded. The cyclical process would then repeat itself. The methods of data collection across the action research design fell primarily within a qualitative framework and included semistructured and informal interviews with teachers and visiting musicians, classroom observations, student questionnaires, and student focus groups through LOCIT which 'encourages everyone involved – teachers, learners, student teachers, teacher educators and researchers – to work together to capture when and why learning moments happen' (Coyle 2010). As mentioned, grounded theory methods were employed during this study as 'systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves' (Charmaz 2006, p. 2). Instead of entering the classroom and interviewing music teachers, students and visiting musicians with an hypothesis or theory to test over the course of the project, an inductive approach was used where the theory was constructed from the data that was collected over the course of the study, through interviews, observations, and feedback forms.

In terms of ethical considerations, four primary considerations which arose before and during the classroom based study were; the representation of truth during the study, ethical considerations under the qualitative paradigm in terms of the personal nature of the field, the process of recruitment for participation, and the relationship between the researcher and the participants. These ethical considerations shaped the research design and data collection procedures. For example, as research within the post-primary education context is by its nature centred primarily around the underage participant, it was vital that certain procedures were followed in this study before any research took place. Before this study could commence certain procedures were adhered to and ethical clearance was sought and received from the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee (ULREC). The 'gatekeeping' process involved the submission of subject, parent, teacher and school principal information sheets, associated informed consent forms, survey and interview questions, risk assessment forms and acceptance of the UL Child

Protection Form. The right for any participant to decline participation any any stage of the study was highlighted before the study commenced, and it is important to note that at no point throughout the research process did any participant express concern over their involvement in the research.

8. Summary of background reading

A starting point for my research into musical pedagogy and learning in an Irish context was the realisation that music education is built upon philosophical foundations, and since the 1950s in particular, music educators have witnessed major developments in the philosophical underpinnings of their profession, which suggest why music education matters, what is most important for music students to learn; and how music education ought to be carried out. For example, over the last couple of decades and until the present day, debates around the philosophical basis for music education seem centred around the opposing aesthetic and praxial philosophies of Bennett Reimer's *Philosophy of Music Education* in 1960, and David Elliott's *Praxial Philosophy of Music Education*, which embodied in *Music Matters* in 1995, challenged the reigning aesthetic philosophy.

However, what remained central to this research in terms of background reading was that I located my emerging grounded theory within relevant literatures, and showed how my work fitted within and extended relevant literatures. This positioning of my research led me deep into literature on such interrelated areas as philosophy of music education mentioned above (eg. David Elliott, Bennett Reimer, Estelle R. Jorgensen, Thomas Regelski, Wayne Bowman); sociology of music education (eg. Hildegard Froehlich); aesthetic experience (eg. John Dewey, Richard Shusterman); educational theory and practice (Paulo Freire); musical meaning, informal learning and enculturation (eg. Lucy Green, Christopher Small, David K. Lines), cultural diversity in music education (eg. Patricia Shehan Campbell, Huib Schippers, Steve Dillon, Christopher Smith, Barbara Lundquist), flow and the psychology of optimal experience (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi), and those texts pertaining to the processes of transmission within the Irish musical tradition (eg. Kari Veblen, Marie McCarthy, Fintan Vallely, Helen O' Shea, Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin) among other areas.

For example, from the analysis of data gathered during the Slí an Cheoil investigation, what has emerged is that the area of 'listening' is a central consideration in terms of the experience of Irish traditional music in the context of the post-primary classroom. Analysis of the data drew attention to relevant literature such as Patricia Sheehan Campbell's (2004) pedagogy of 'attentive', 'engaged', and 'enactive' listening, which resonates interestingly with Thomas Turino's (2008) 'listening' as personal and social experience. In terms of listening Bennett Reimer also makes the point that we 'too seldom give credit to the creativity of musical listening' and that this 'leaves too neglected the development of the one capacity on which all experience of music depends – discerning, creative listening' (Reimer, 1970). In *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead For Music Education* (2002) and *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy* (2008), Lucy Green encourages the fostering and promotion of musical enculturation through the three strands of purposive, attentive and distracted listening in classroom listening experiences (2002) and investigates 'listening and appreciation' in the context of providing musical meaning and experience in the secondary school classroom (2008). In terms of this research, the

challenge lay in engaging with literature associated with each emerging category to reveal the gaps in existing knowledge. Showing how my grounded theory 'answered' these gaps then allowed me to position my study and clarify its contribution.

9. Overview of research findings and recommendations

Slí an Cheoil was a significant study which took place over sixteen weeks with participants including two music teachers, a fifth year class of nine students, and a second year class of twenty-one students respectively. Four visiting musicians also took part in the investigation. From the classroom observations (including those where Irish traditional musicians visited), a final 'concert', informal interviews, student focus groups, and teacher and student questionnaires, several categories emerged through grounded theory. These have in turn led to the development of a theoretical paradigm which are in effect a conceptualisation of principles of optimum experience in Irish traditional music in post-primary music education. I have used the term 'principles' in this context as meaning 'generalities that capture the determining characteristics or essential qualities of a phenomenon or activity' (Reimer 1992, p. 22). While this theoretical paradigm is still currently being developed, and will form the basis of my doctoral thesis, a copy of which will be sent to *The Teaching Council* upon completion, an overview of the findings thus far are presented here.

Outlined below are the principles which have emerged from this research as being constituents of optimum experience in Irish traditional music in the educational context of the post-primary classroom.

- ~ Cyclical Continuum of Aural Progression
- ~ Continuum of Participatory Performance
- ~ Interchanging roles of teacher and learner
- ~ Principle of Presentational Performance
- ~ Associated Extrinsic Values
- ~ Continuity of Experience
- ~ Introspective Motivation
- ~ Challenge and *Flow* (Csikszentmihalyi 1990 / 1991)
- ~ Enjoyment, Fun and Play

Through the aforementioned action research design, Irish traditional music was introduced to the classroom in a cyclical collaborative process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This research suggests that by engaging in formal educational environments with these emergent principles of optimum experience, a negotiation of the dichotomy which exists between pedagogies of community and classroom contexts can be encouraged and enabled. Importantly, this research suggests that the furtherance of a sustained dialogical continuum between the post-primary music classroom and the Irish traditional music community, and a necessary negotiation of the prevalent music education pedagogies, would ensure for post-primary music teachers and students a pedagogy grounded in the practices of the community that Irish traditional music serves.

For the purposes of this overview, three of these principles are presented here in greater detail.

~ **Cyclical Continuum of Aural Progression:** Aural learning and playing 'by ear' is a central aspect of the transmission of Irish traditional music. Both teachers expressed a sense of unease and unfamiliarity with the idea of teaching their classes 'by ear' and neither teacher had previously taught Irish traditional music in this way. I taught each teacher to play whistle 'by ear' on a weekly basis and some of the issues which arose during these occasions were:

- negotiating the dissimilarities in language to teach a teacher whose pedagogy was for the most part grounded in the western art music tradition
- negotiating the dichotomy which exists between contrasting pedagogies
- teaching the teacher, while at the same time being conscious of the need to impart informal teaching methods to the teacher
- encouraging the teacher to 'let go' and trust the process of aural learning
- the challenge of imparting meaning and significance when teaching a tune 'by ear'

As each teacher learned to play whistle, and then taught their students to play the tin-whistle 'by ear', what emerged from the classroom observations in terms of the students' ear-learning and playing experiences was a cyclical continuum of aural progression across six listening modes which I have called *distracted listening*, *remote listening*, *attentive listening*, *engaged listening*, *enactive listening*, and *reflective listening*. As a student, and indeed a music teacher, moves along this cyclical continuum, the level of engagement with Irish traditional music increases. The findings suggest that during an aural learning experience, students and teachers can move back and forth along the continuum as the diagram below will suggest, for example, from attentive listening to engaged listening, and back to attentive listening. The following is a brief explanation of each mode of listening which was identified through grounded theory observations during these classes.

Distracted listening - where the listener pays no conscious attention whatsoever to the music or may be completely unaware of the music's existence

Remote listening - where the listener is conscious of the music and is listening to the music as a whole, but is not necessarily engaging with the music on an attentive level

Attentive listening - where the listener is directed by the teacher to focus on musical phrases, elements, and structures

Responsive listening - where the listener actively participates to some extent in playing the tune as demonstrated by the teacher. Listening with the purpose of responding with the general structure of what the student has just listened to.

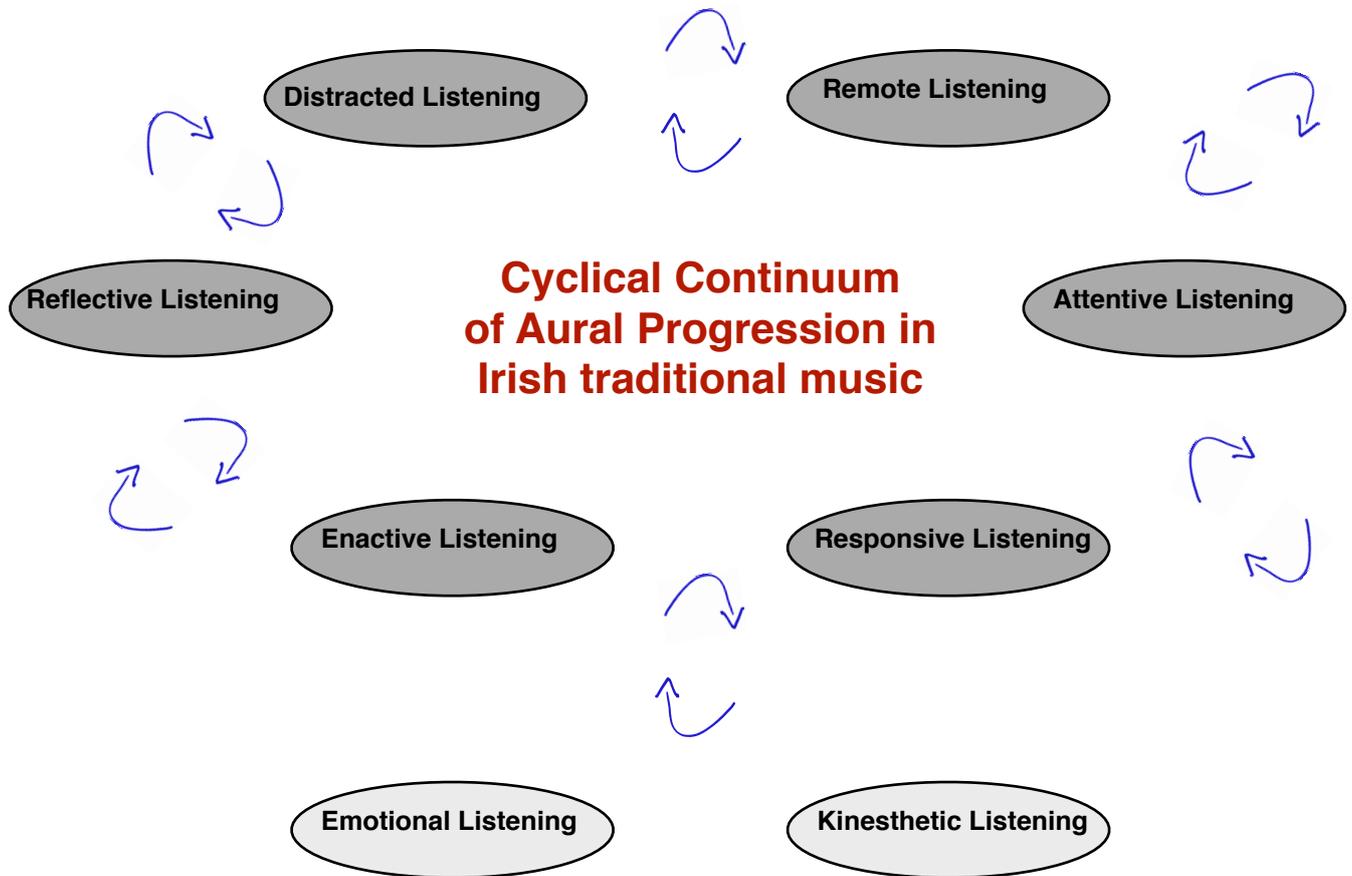
Enactive listening - where the listener listens intensely to every musical nuance of the tune for the purpose of recreating what they hear (Campbell 2005)

Reflective listening - where the listener after recreating what they have listened to through enactive listening, then reflects on and reinterprets the music for others to listen to

Other modes of listening identified to varying degrees over the course of the project were: emotional listening which is 'characterised by deeply felt emotion' and kinesthetic listening which is 'characterised by the auditor's compulsion to move' (Huron 2002).

It is important to point out that there are many factors (prior experience, level of perceived challenge, required psychomotor skills etc.) which determine the length of time it takes for a student to progress along this aural listening continuum, *if* a student progresses along this

continuum, *how* the listener proceeds along the continuum, and also *with which* mode each student engages along the continuum.



~ Continuum of Participatory Performance

Participatory performance in this context refers to the teacher and student actively engaging with Irish traditional music by means including yet beyond that of playing a musical instrument. In the context of *Slí an Cheoil* this occurred through body rhythms, céilí dancing, clapping along with the music, singing the tune etc.. That is, participatory performance is ‘actively contributing to the sound and motion of a musical event through dancing, singing, clapping, and playing musical instruments’ (Turino 2008, p. 28). The findings of this research in this context strongly resonate with Turino’s definition of participatory performance as a ‘special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions’ (p. 26) where ‘the quality of the performance is ultimately judged on the level of participation achieved’ (p. 29). Also, Christopher Small’s ‘musicking’ bears considerable weight in this context in terms of the relationships which were established through participatory performance, and the meanings which lay within these relationships (Small 1998). From the LOCIT observations, the research found that there was a continuum of participatory performance through which the teacher and student could engage with and within Irish traditional music, and various roles and relationships were brought into existence through these participatory experiences. The three modes across this participatory performance continuum that I identified

during the project I have called **passive participation**, **rotary participation**, and **absolute participation**, and participants moved easily between the three modes*.

*It was found that the continuum of participatory performance is extrinsically linked to that of that the cyclical continuum of aural progression, and overlaps in many instances, in that listening is always integral to participation within the tradition.

Passive participation, where the teacher and students engaged with the participatory performance in the capacity of passive observer (audience), 'looking in from the outside' so to speak.

Rotary participation, where the teacher and students engaged with the participatory performance to a greater extent, and moved freely between the roles of 'artist' and 'audience'

Absolute participation, where there was equal partnership with little or no distinction between artist and audience in the classroom. Where everyone was engaged and the focus was 'primarily inward, among participants in the moment' (Turino 2008, p. 29).



~ Interchanging roles of teacher and learner

The third principle of optimum experience which emerged from the research is concerned with the role of teacher and learner where an experience of Irish traditional music in the post-primary music classroom is concerned. During the LOCIT process, teachers and students identified learning moments where there was a distinct blurring of the lines between the roles of teacher and learner. That is, there were occasions during whistle lessons, listening experiences, and céilí dancing etc. where students identified fellow students as being in the role of 'teacher', and other occasions where both teacher and student were identified by all participants as assuming a more equal or 'sharing' role. This is significant in that it contradicts the traditional teacher-student dichotomy where learning means 'acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders' (Dewey 1938 / 1997, p. 19) and what influential educationalist Paulo Freire terms the 'banking' concept of education (Freire 1972) in favour of an Irish traditional music education which is situated in the lived experience of the teacher and students.

Each of these principles will be outlined in full in my PhD thesis which is entitled *The Bloom of Youth: Experiencing Irish Traditional Music in Post-Primary Music Education*. This thesis will acknowledge the support of *The Teaching Council* will be presented to *The Teaching Council* on completion.

10. How the research has contributed to your professional development

The research bursary which was awarded to me by *The Teaching Council* has thus far been hugely instrumental in enabling me to engage fully and effectively with my research, and importantly, with others in the field of Irish traditional music studies, music education research and other related

disciplines. *The Teaching Council* recognised the potential of and need for this research, and the bursary has allowed me to make huge strides into an area of inquiry in Ireland which was previously largely unattended to. As I become an expert in my area, my career prospects are furthered in many ways. The research has allowed the various strands of my experience as a musician and as an academic to merge, and it will allow me to go on to develop sustainable school projects and initial teacher training programmes. The research has provided me with innumerable learning opportunities, such as presenting my research at the Post Primary Music Teachers' Association's Annual Conference 2010 and other international national and international conferences. The findings from my research have the potential to reach across all musical genres in educational contexts beyond that of an Irish context. This potential, along with the fact that The Teaching Council is recognised and valued the world-over will certainly have a positive impact on my future career development.

11. How this research will benefit the teaching profession and the wider education community

It is intended that this research will significantly benefit the teaching profession and the wider education community. In the first instance, in terms of the post-primary music teaching profession, it is hoped that this research will act as a guide towards teachers and students achieving optimum experiences in Irish traditional music in post-primary music education which are grounded in the practices of the Irish traditional music community beyond the classroom. Beyond Irish traditional music, or music for that matter, the underlying philosophy of this research is that experiences in formal education should be relevant to and connect with teachers' and students' lives outside the formal classroom environment. This research is one step towards realising a greater classroom-community continuum along which these optimum experiences occur, and it demonstrates how optimum experiences can be recognised and achieved to a greater extent in educational contexts, regardless of level or subject genre. To benefit the teaching profession and wider education community (including Primary and Higher Education) in these and other ways, this research has implications in terms of pedagogical approaches in the classroom, learning outcomes to assessment strategies, initial teacher training to the allocation of resources. In addition to the primary education sector, post-primary music education, third-level music teacher training courses, the results of this research will have resonances with music education policy makers, Irish traditional musicians and local arts authorities. This research has the potential to benefit the cause of education across these various interrelated areas.

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