



Positive partnerships: linking secondary schools to university

ET Staff

Anyone teaching music and languages will tell you that there isn't exactly huge enthusiasm for promoting either as a career path after school, it's just unfortunate that by doing so some rich educational and life experiences are precluded.

The reasons for learning languages are manifold, it isn't just about the acquisition of another tongue, it's about having a global perspective and it's also good exercise for the grey matter. The same holds true for music, but despite that it's far too common for both to be forgotten after high school.

Part of the problem is also that students often leave school faced with the prospect of university life without much idea of what it involves. What that results in exactly is debatable, but it's fair to say it leads to a sense of dislocation and in the worst cases an unwillingness to continue with uni courses.

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An introduction to university life and what it involves has been a big part of Bianca Porcheddu's approach to language and music teaching. She has been a secondary school teacher for 12 years with a particular interest in curriculum development and integrating units of work that link to the outside community. Currently she is teaching Italian at Francis Xavier College Florey, ACT.

In her own life Porcheddu's passion for music, particularly Baroque violin – she has been a regular member of the Australian Brandenburg

Orchestra (ABO) since 1999 and is Concert Master of the Canberra Choral Society Baroque Ensemble – forced her into leaving Australia to access a masters course. It wasn't all bad, what followed was two incredible years in the Hague.

"I was lucky to have a career touring Europe and Asia with some of Europe's leading Baroque Orchestras, such as the European Union Baroque Orchestra after my Masters, working with a diverse mix of people from all over the world – I think this changed my life experiences and perspectives immensely too, including having to be flexible and tolerant when working in a multi-lingual work force.

"I like to bring those work/life experiences to my class, it has to be impressed upon students that it's OK to fail and to take risks.

"Often students are told that that path of a musician or a linguist is hard, and it is, but by taking a leap and getting to the other side some

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rich life experiences can be found. Take one of my music students, after being encouraged to follow her passion through to the tertiary level she is now attending Julliard in New York,” Porcheddu says.

While TAFE and vocational training have long had a focus on familiarising and preparing students with the progression from high school to post secondary education and on to work, it isn't really the case with those following a path through university.

Toward addressing that lack of integration Porcheddu has formed links with the ANU's School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics with her senior Italian class recently making an eye-opening visit there. The event was facilitated and hosted by Dr Piera Carroli, Senior Lecturer and Convener of the Italian Studies Program at the university.

“Last year 12 of our students entered OzCLO (The Australian Computational and Linguistics Olympiad) where entrants have to tackle some very complex coded linguistic problems. They attended some training programs at the ANU and the relationship began there.

“The students loved the linguistics staff at the university and they loved being on campus. They also discovered that learning a language can lead into so many different areas.

“They were able to compare their language skills with the first and second year Italian language students and were encouraged about where they stood which was a great confidence builder especially with those who weren't at the very top of the class,” Porcheddu says.

It was an invaluable experience, providing the students with a rich insight into the life of an ANU student, with a focus on incorporating Italian or foreign language studies in an undergraduate degree.

“Experiences outside of the classroom such as this are important components in delivering a sound foreign language curriculum in Australia, as they provide students with a nurturing platform to view post-secondary life in anticipation.

“The interactive nature of events such as this also provides enriching and insightful opportunities that help our students become well-rounded and culturally tolerant young global citizens,” Porcheddu says.

Ms Bahaar Grover from the university introduced the visiting students to the ANU International Exchange program as an alternative to a gap year investigating the fermented beverages of the world. Students discovered they could study Italian in one of many countries, such as Canada, America, many European and Asian countries, and, of course, Italy.

Bianca Porcheddu and Dr Carroli encourage all other secondary foreign language teachers to get involved with the ANU as part of their language program and the intention is to make this an annual event.



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