

# Violin Teaching in Regional Communities

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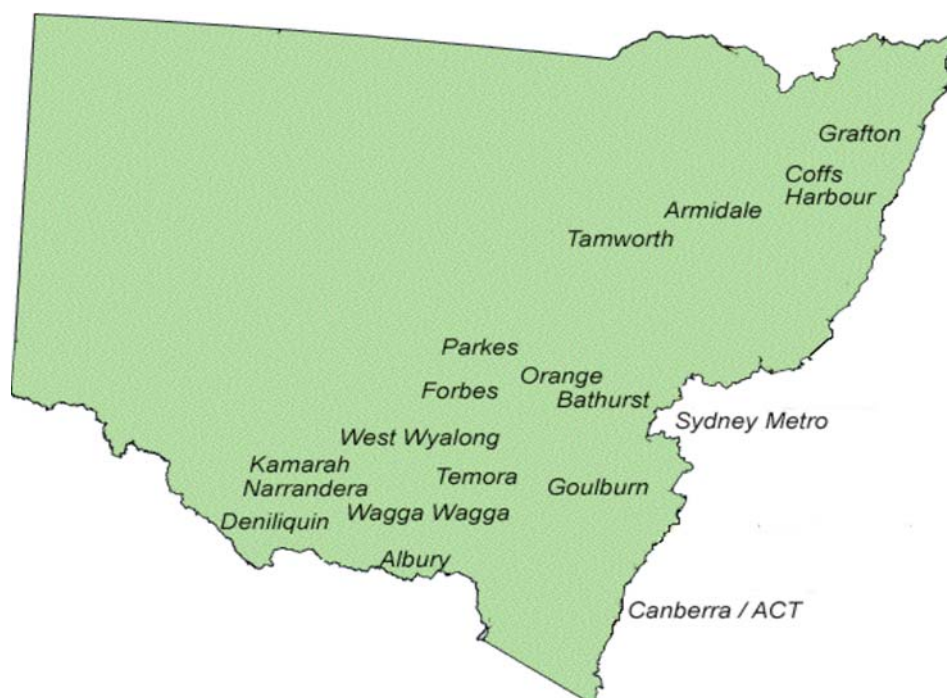
This paper presents the results of a survey of 16 Violin Teachers living and teaching in Regional Communities in NSW. The Survey was conducted during March and April 2008 and was presented at the **2008 Violin Pedagogy Australia Conference** held at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

This project was inspired by my experience of moving to the country to work as a performing violinist and teacher. Many of the 'large-city-violinist-mindsets' I brought with me from Sydney are continually being reviewed and renewed because, as I keep discovering, musical life is different in the country. This year I was presented with the opportunity to find out if other teachers' experiences were similar or dissimilar to mine.

I interviewed Violin Teachers from 16 different towns in Regional NSW:

*Albury, Armidale, Bathurst, Coffs Harbour, Deniliquin, Forbes, Goulburn, Grafton, Kamarah, Narrandera, Orange, Parkes, Tamworth, Temora, Wagga Wagga and West Wyalong. (See map below)*

The questions (and results) that follow are intended to cover a wide range of topics that affect most teachers and hopefully will generate a deeper awareness and understanding of the experiences of Violin Teachers in the country.



## Teacher Backgrounds

### How did you come to teach in a Regional Community?

Had other career, fulfilled a need for a violin teacher	-	50%
Moved from another area to teach in Regional area	-	44%
Have always lived & worked there	-	6%

### How long have you been teaching in a Regional Community?

Less than 10 years	-	63%
11 - 20 years	-	12%
More than 20 years	-	25%

### Have you ever taught in a large city?

Yes	-	56%
No	-	44%

### Are there any significant differences?

*Some responses:*

- *Greater opportunities for students in cities with ensemble participation & concert attendance*
- *Students get on really well with each other, more community feel, less students learning 'because they had to'*
- *Opportunities in large city well established, in RC, have to generate them, your own enthusiasm being a significant factor to its success*
- *Performance opportunities limited for staff, can be more rewarding if there are other good teachers in area– less isolating*

### Is there any greater satisfaction or dissatisfaction in teaching in a Regional Community?

Satisfying	-	67%
Dissatisfying	-	6%
Same anywhere	-	12%
Undecided	-	12%

*Some responses:*

- *was able to find a nice balance between Performing and teaching in one contained spot.*
- *close knit community, see students grow & develop in all aspects of education*
- *more control & responsibility as a teacher of all aspects of a students development, can take a greater pride in the results*
- *can be sad when good students are sent away for high school & stop learning*

### Did you teach yourself violin?

Self taught	-	19%
Not self taught	-	81%

**Were teaching / performing qualifications relevant for you to teach in your Regional Community?**

Qualifications Relevant	-	24%
Qualifications Irrelevant	-	57%
Experience important	-	19%

**Do you teach other instruments?**

Piano	-	53%
Viola	-	44%
Cello	-	20%
Other	-	20%
None	-	20%

**What is the highest level you are comfortable teaching up to?**

4th grade	-	12%
6th grade	-	18%
8th grade	-	19%
No limit	-	50%

**Have any of your students undertaken tertiary study?**

Yes	-	50%
No	-	50%

**Opportunities for Violin teachers in Regional Communities**

**Is Violin teaching a full time job for you?**

Full time	-	31%
Part time	-	69%

**Self - employed or employed by an institution?**

Self employed	-	50%
Employed by institution	-	50%

**Permanent or casual?**

Permanent	-	25%
Casual	-	75%

**What performance opportunities are there for you?**

Don't perform	-	31%
Less than 10 per year	-	25%
More than 10 per year	-	44%

**Opportunities include:**

- *recitals, make most opportunities myself*
- *mostly gigs*
- *Contemporary Band*
- *orchestral, chamber, soloist with orchestra*
- *school based performances, local ensembles*
- *many great players in this area, many opportunities*

**Is there currently a need for more violin teachers in your Regional Community? What is the demand for violin lessons like?**

City	Teacher need?	Demand
Albury	no	fairly high
Armidale	yes	Very high
Bathurst	yes	fairly high
Coffs Harbour	yes	moderate
Deniliquin	yes	Very high
Forbes	no	low
Goulburn	no	low
Grafton	no	low
Kamarah	yes	Very high
Narrandera	yes	Very high
Orange	no	Moderate - high
Parkes	no	moderate
Temora	no	low
Wagga Wagga	yes	moderate
West Wyalong	yes	moderate

**What's the furthest distance a student has traveled to have lessons with you?**

Up to 30 mins	-	24%
30 - 60 mins	-	19%
1 - 2 hrs	-	57%

**What's your ratio of male to female students?**

Male	-	75%
Female	-	25%

**What's your ratio of School age to Mature age students?**

School age	-	85%
Mature age	-	15%

**What's the youngest age you begin students?**

6 - 7 years	-	50%
4 - 5 years	-	44%
younger than 4	-	6%

**Do your students take theory or musicianship lessons?**

Yes	-	94%
No	-	6%

**What is competition like between teachers in your Regional Community?**

Minimal or no competition	-	63%
Teachers very supportive	-	31%
Negative	-	6%

**Professional Development Opportunities**

**Are there PDO available to you in your Regional Community?**

Never	-	50%
Infrequently	-	37%
Frequently	-	13%

**Do you get a satisfactory amount of PDO?**

Yes	-	50%
No	-	50%

**Where do you source PDO?**

- larger regional centers
- large Cities
- through regional conservatoriums
- Austa
- Visiting musicians (eg. Musica viva & AYO)
- Journals, Internet

**Are there any logistical issues that impact these opportunities?**

Travel / distance	-	60%
Cost	-	40%
None	-	25%

**Perceived value of violin tuition in your regional community**

**Is there any positive or negative perception of the value of violin tuition by the broader community?**

Positive	-	43%
Negative	-	25%
Seen as Hobby	-	19%
Depends on Teacher	-	13%

**Is there any greater enthusiasm (from the students) to either resident teachers or non-resident teachers?**

Visiting teachers	-	31%
Resident teachers	-	13%
No difference	-	56%

### **Have there been frequent teacher changes?**

Yes	-	44%
No	-	56%

### **Is it a hard or easy task recruiting students & developing string programs in your Regional Community?**

Hard	-	56%
Moderate	-	25%
Easy	-	19%

*Some responses:*

- *the drop out rate is higher*
- *depends on energy & enthusiasm of teacher*
- *particularly hard sustaining programs*

### **Lesson Fees**

#### **What Lesson fees are charged in your area for a half hour lesson?**

highest	-	\$30
Lowest	-	\$20
Average	-	\$24.58

#### **Do you find that other financial pressures - drought, fuel, and interest rates - affect lessons?**

56% of teachers experience these effects on violin tuition

*Some responses:*

- *Demand reduced*
- *Yes, especially other opportunities like ensembles & - concert attendance*
- *Lesson lengths reduced*

### **Repertoire trends**

#### **What repertoire to you commonly use in teaching?**

- Suzuki material, examination material
- Huge variety – traditional classical, blue grass, irish
- AMEB, other genres
- Nelson / Cohen, Australian music
- Givens – Adventures in Violinland
- Wide range
- Wide range of styles, no particular tutor book
- Paul Rolland – New Tunes for Strings
- AMEB & Suzuki
- AMEB & Suzuki + supplements
- AMEB & Suzuki + whatever they bring
- Depends on availability if music available in music shop
- AMEB + supplements
- Schradiek for beginners, then AMEB books
- Nelson, Thorp, AMEB
- AMEB, Fiddle Time, Edward Huws Jones Fiddle Books

### **Where do you source sheet music?**

Large City	-	43%
Local music shop	-	38%
Internet	-	19%

### **Do you teach according to any popular method?**

*No Responses*

### **Trends in examinations**

#### **Do you use any examination systems?**

AMEB	-	61%
Trinity	-	22%
ANZCA	-	17%

#### **Are exams beneficial to your student's development?**

Yes	-	68%
No	-	19%
undecided	-	13%

#### **Are exams any more useful in a Regional Community?**

Yes	-	69%
No	-	31%

#### *Some responses:*

- sometimes harder to identify progress with fewer peers learning.*
- especially useful for advanced students*
- examiners offer good impartial feedback, offering more exposure for student*
- keeps them on track, otherwise hard to motivate practice*

#### **Are exams frequent enough in your community?**

Yes	-	69%
No	-	31%

#### **Do logistical issues impact on the use of exams?**

Travel	-	50%
None	-	50%

### **In-school teaching**

#### **Do you teach violin in schools? (Privately or in groups)?**

Yes	-	75%
No	-	25%

## Competitions

### **Are there enough competitive opportunities available in your Regional Community**

Yes	-	56%
No	-	44%

*Opportunities include:*

- *Eisteddfods, Regional Conservatorium scholarship opportunities, Orange Regional Conservatorium violin competition*

### **Are competitions more useful in a Regional Community**

Yes	-	69%
No	-	31%

*Some responses:*

- *reduces isolation, able to meet other students*
- *goals to aim for, fun to play with other people*

## Ensembles

### **Are your students involved in ensembles?**

Yes	-	81%
No	-	19%

### **Is there any greater importance on ensembles as an opportunity for students in your Regional Communities?**

Yes	-	56%
No	-	44%

*Some responses:*

- *very much so, socially as well.*
- *It's important for students to know other people are learning.*
- *more so in schools, but hard to maintain numbers*

## Piano Accompaniment

### **Are there Piano accompanists in your Regional Community?**

Yes	-	100%
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### **What level do they accompany up to?**

All levels	-	81%
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### **Do you accompany your students?**

Yes	-	50%
No	-	50%



## Workshops by visiting teachers

### How frequent are workshops?

Armidale	-	Frequently
Kamarah	-	Frequently
West Wyalong	-	Frequently
Orange	-	Frequently
Temora	-	Infrequently
Wagga Wagga	-	Infrequently
Bathurst	-	Infrequently
Coffs Harbour	-	Infrequently
Goulburn	-	Infrequently
Parkes	-	Infrequently
Albury	-	Infrequently
Narrandera	-	Never
Grafton	-	Never
Deniliquin	-	Never
Forbes	-	Never

### Are (or would) these be valuable in your community?

Yes	-	56%
Depends on who	-	19%
Undecided	-	25%

## Video Conference Teaching

Currently only in Armidale, Deniliquin & Orange

- *Internet protocol based technology quite new and being trialed*

Only 38% of teachers surveyed currently have access to these resources.

## Music & Equipment

### Do you have a local music shop?

75% have a local music shop

### Is their service supportive to you & your students?

69% of teachers are happy with the service they provide

31% say they are too slow at ordering music & equipment.

### Is there a Luthier in your city?

44% of teachers have access to a luthier in their immediate region

### How far do your students have to travel for repairs?

- 56% of teachers' students have to travel between 1 and 4 1/2 hrs
- Average travel time: 2.65 hrs
- None of the local music shops repair string instruments
- 19% of teachers surveyed are able to repair instruments

### Is there instrument hire available in your community?

Yes	-	75%
No	-	25%

**Are there any trends of instrument brands? and Cost vs. Quality?**

<b>City</b>	<b>Brands</b>	<b>Cost vs. Quality</b>
Temora	Ashton	Cost
Wagga Wagga	Variety, Stentor, John Wu	Depends
Narandera	Ashton – colours very popular	Cost
Bathurst	Hand made chinese, gliga, ragetti	Depends
Armidale	John Wu	Quality
Grafton	Ashton	Cost
Coffs Harbour	Stentor	Cost
Goulburn	Gliga, Antonio,	Depends
Kamarah	older instruments	Quality
Albury	Ashton, Stentor	Cost
West Wyalong	Mainly violins passed down	Depends
Deniliquin	Stentor	Depends
Orange	John Wu, Gliga, Stentor	Depends
Parkes	Arts Music, enrico, Stentor	Cost
Forbes	Variety, John Wu	Cost

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**Andrew Baker** currently holds the position of Assistant Director & Head of Strings at the Orange Regional Conservatorium in NSW, teaching violin to over 30 students per week in Orange and the surrounding regions. Andrew coaches chamber music ensembles and orchestras, and is concertmaster of the Orange Symphony Orchestra. He also runs workshops and support programs for regional string teachers and performs in over 20 performances a year in solo, orchestral and chamber music.