EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 24 June 2013

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Associate Professor J. Kane, National Director of Professional and Community Experience, Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University.
The CHAIR — I will begin. We have a full house today, all for you because we have missed you; unfortunately we could not get things coordinated. We are glad that we have been able to make this all happen. I need to run through a couple of things quickly, and then we will get into it. Firstly, what we are doing is part of the inquiry. You know what the inquiry is about, and we are really keen today to hear about your experiences with music and how we can provide better opportunities for young people with music in schools, but I need to point out just a couple of things. Firstly, we will be recording your information today via Hansard, and you will have the opportunity to review that and make any corrections that need to be made. Secondly, the evidence that you give today is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament, and that applies only to what is said at the hearing proper, not anything that is said outside of the hearing.

I have the formalities out of the way, so what we can do is maybe kick off with some questions, or would you have any opening remarks you wanted to make?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — No, I am happy to take questions first. That will be great.

The CHAIR — Okay, great, and if there is anything we miss, we can cover that at the end. I might kick it off, Jan, if I could. So far we have had many key stakeholders to the inquiry state that music should be taught by specialist music teachers in primary schools rather than classroom teachers. Who do you think should be responsible for teaching music in primary schools, and why?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — I am probably going to be kind of bucking the trend a bit here because I think it should be taught by the generalist classroom teacher, but I think it should be a type of hybrid model where we have the opportunity for some specialist teachers to be brought in, particularly in the upper primary. I think that would be very valuable, but I think that the classroom teacher has the opportunity in teaching music to be able to integrate it throughout their curriculum.

One of the great things about music is that it can really enrich and enliven the curriculum and really engage students. I think it is important that it is not seen as a separate thing. I think it is part of the fabric of our everyday lives, and I often say to my students, ‘Do you just stop and think about, from when you got up this morning to when you got to the university, how much music you have heard?’. It is on the radio, it is on the television, it is in advertising et cetera. For children coming to school it is the same thing. I think we need to break down that barrier of music being seen as something separate; rather, it is part of our lives, and we can all engage with it very effectively.

I think one of the things we need to work on is developing in our students a sense of self-efficacy — their belief in their own musical abilities. In my research and the work I have been doing with students I have found that one of the biggest barriers to effective teaching of music in classrooms by generalist primary teachers is their own lack of belief in themselves or their own perception that they have poor musical abilities. My feeling is that part of that is due to it being seen as something separate or something other. I think there is a place for expert people in music, teachers of music and specialist teachers to work with the classroom teacher, but I would not like to see it taken away from the classroom teacher.

The CHAIR — Extending further from that, in terms of where we need to put our focus, would you agree that it is the primary area that we should really be targeting more?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — Yes; I was speaking about the primary area in that first response. My specialist area is primary music education. I think in secondary schools it is a different matter. Obviously in secondary schools we have teachers with specific discipline specialisation. It is most appropriate, I think, for music to be taught there by the specialists. But I think in primary school is where we need to enable, encourage and facilitate students at school to connect with music and see it as part of their lives and a sense of community.

I very much think we need to look at highlighting music as a key element of the curriculum rather than slightly marginalising it, as it seems to be happening in some cases in New South Wales, and I am sure in Victoria as well. We have a very strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and it is unfortunate that the Arts seem to be being marginalised as a consequence of that. I absolutely believe that primary school is where we need to lay the foundation. I often say to my pre-service teaching students here at the university that it is our role to get the students really enthusiastic about music, committed to it and engaged with it, and then to develop the skills and
knowledge. But if we do not send them up into secondary schooling with some enthusiasm for it, that is where we often see, particularly in the middle of the secondary years, that students disengage with music.

The CHAIR — Excellent. I am going to hand over to Gayle now.

Ms TIERNEY — Jan, with that answer my question is a good follow-up. The ACU submission notes that many primary classroom teachers feel underprepared and lack the confidence to deliver quality education upon graduating. What strategies can you suggest for improving the musical skills and the confidence of pre-service primary school teachers during their teacher training?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — I have been taking a particular approach here at ACU in New South Wales based on my doctoral studies and on work that I did when I was previously at Macquarie University. My belief is that we need to take a success-based approach. If we want them to feel confident themselves about teaching music, I think they need to experience success in engaging with music as young adults who are preparing to go out into the classrooms. The approach I have taken involves immersion in music. I think it cannot be taught at arm’s length. It is not like where you give them a textbook and say, ‘Okay, go and read up on this or that’. Certainly we could pen-and-paper test them with that type of thing, and they may show adequate or good levels of knowledge, but my feeling is that they have got to engage with it. So I have been using a different type of program where I get them to learn about music and teach each other about music through performance. They are immersed as a cooperative group. They have to take one of the key units of work that is specified within the New South Wales syllabus in the curriculum, and through performance they have to teach their peers musical knowledge, learning and understanding related to that unit of work. In that way I am doing two things. One is that I am getting them to be immersed in music; they have to work with it and also link it to other forms of the creative arts. So obviously if they are performing, there are links to drama and visual arts and movement — dance, et cetera — but I am also getting them to connect to these really valuable syllabus documents, which are the units of work, or they may be called modules of work in some places, the set syllabus itself.

I really feel one of the barriers to people’s perceptions of their ability to teach music is the performance component of it. I do not necessarily mean stage performance but just the demonstration component. If a young teacher, a new teacher or any other sort of teacher feels they have poor levels of musical ability themselves, having to actually get up and demonstrate some form of music can be a real barrier for them. My aim is to put them into a situation where they have to do it, where they get that sense of understanding that it is not something they cannot do. It is absolutely amazing leading up to these performances that often students will go, ‘This is a big task’ and, ‘It’s really difficult’. Often there are various group issues that I sometimes need to mediate et cetera. But it is just incredible to see the change that happens in them after the performance — after they see what they have done and what their peers have done and how accessible music can be.

My approach is that I think we need to send students away from teacher education courses having had a sense of success with music. Then they will be enthusiastic to work with it in schools.

Ms TIERNEY — Thank you.

Ms MILLER — I think you have raised some really interesting points; I thank you for that. Following on from your last comment about teachers getting involved, the committee has heard that there is a shortage of specialist music teachers within the primary sector. I ask you: what strategies can you suggest to increase the number of specialist music teachers available within primary schools?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — I think it is interesting that we often have students coming into teacher education programs who have a musical background. It may be in instrument playing, it may be in voice. Students who come in with that background and those skills and expertise will often say to me things like, ‘How do I become a specialist music teacher in a school?’. In secondary school there is obviously a pathway because of the discipline-focused nature of teaching in secondary schools. But I think that that is something that government should really consider putting some funding into — setting up programs for those students who would like to be specialist music teachers and who could move from school to school. They could have a certain range of schools that they work within to provide this injection of expert input to support the classroom teacher.

I think we need to develop those kinds of pathways. I think at the moment it is a bit hit and miss. If a student graduates with a teacher education qualification and they have qualifications or a very strong background in music, they are sometimes lucky to find a position that may be being offered; often it is in the private school
sector. But I think we need to look at funding that kind of position in our public schools. I also think we need to look at ways of developing pathways in our teacher education programs.

It would probably be a reasonably small cohort that you would be talking about, but there are people who could provide that kind of input. If they come out of a generalist primary teacher education program, then they have those sets of skills which I think are crucially important. I think sometimes when schools bring in a specialist teacher in a particular area that teacher may not necessarily have the generalist classroom teaching skills that are really needed to be able to break down their specialist knowledge into relevant language or to be able to cater to the various ability levels in the classrooms that they work in.

Ms MILLER — Would it be an option to offer a six-month extension to the teacher training program so that graduate teachers could specialise? That would mean that when teachers went to a school they would not only be a graduates but they would also have that additional expertise of six months specialisation?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — I think that would be excellent; that would be a great idea, because it gives them the solid foundation of the teacher preparation and then it gives them that opportunity to really flourish and develop depth, I guess, in the area of music education. Yes, I would absolutely wholeheartedly support that idea.

Ms MILLER — Thank you.

Mr CRISP — I am going to look at the role of professional development. In your earlier comments you talked about the need to feel success and to be engaged. I took that to mean that was in the curriculum area, where we are training teachers. With that in mind, what role can professional development play in improving the musical skills and confidence of primary classroom teachers and what types of programs should be available to in-service teachers?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — I think this is a really important area, Peter, of the work that we do in universities, but I think that we need to develop it much more. With the AITSL accreditation requirements now and obviously the requirement for teachers to move through the levels of accreditation and proficiency, this is an ideal opportunity to develop the professional development component of our work with teachers in schools.

I think bringing them in for intensive sessions or offering those sessions perhaps at the universities as weekend programs, or it might even be possible to offer them in clusters — there may be a place where those kinds of programs could be offered where teachers could come from a range of schools. It needs to be this type of immersion approach. That is my belief. Others would have other ways of looking at it. It is the same thing. We need to build in our generalist classroom teachers this sense of confidence that they can in fact teach music really effectively in their classrooms.

Another really important thing that we should be doing in professional development is really working with teachers on how to use resources effectively, because while I am sure there will probably be many people who will never believe they are truly musical, there is a huge range of resources out there and available for teachers to work with. But again we need to develop the expertise and the confidence in teachers to look at these resources and work with them effectively. That is also a really important part of the work that we do.

In New South Wales we have a program called Vocal-Ease which has been written specifically to support the music syllabus. I think those kinds of resources are great, ones that are written to link directly into the syllabus and curriculum documents. But I also think we need to develop a broader awareness in our teachers of the tremendous range of resources that are there and which are quite accessible to work with as long as you basically have the confidence to have a go.

Mr CRISP — Thank you.

Mr ELASMAR — Thanks, Jan. My question will be in two parts. The first part is: how much time in the curriculum do you think schools should allocate to music on a weekly basis? The second part is: what is the optimum balance in the curriculum between music and other arts forms such as visual arts, drama and dance?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — It is an interesting question. In New South Wales the Board of Studies has set — which I am sure you have probably heard of already — a rough percentage guide in which English and mathematics receive 45% to 55% of time within the curriculum and the other key learning areas receive 25% to
35%. When that is broken down it brings music down to receiving between 6% and 10% of time. I really think music needs more than that, because one of the great things about music is that it develops a wide range of generic skills that can be generalised into other parts of the primary curriculum.

Skills such as listening, concentration, cooperation and teamwork, problem solving and evaluation are really important, crucial, benchmarking-type skills that we need to develop in our students across the board in primary education and all education. I really believe that music is able to develop those skills and to develop them in a way that is really engaging for the children to work with. If we are looking at English and maths getting somewhere around 30% et cetera, I would like to see music up there at around at least 15% — I would like to see 20% but I doubt that that would happen.

The other thing is that I think it links very well to the other arts areas. To digress for a moment, unfortunately what we often find in primary schools is that teachers feel more confident in teaching visual arts. If you just give a percentage of time to the creative arts or to the Arts as a whole, you tend to find that teachers teach much more visual arts than music, so I think the idea of specifying a percentage of time as a guide for each of the Arts areas is well worth doing. But in our planning up here in New South Wales the whole creative arts is given 6 to 10% of the time. I would definitely like to see that increase; I would be looking at at least 15 to 20%, if possible — 20% ideally.

The CHAIR — Jan, I just wanted to touch on an area we spoke about earlier and that is schools that may not have any music programs at all at primary school and how you might kick them off, obviously engaging the general music teacher. Are there some strategies, things they could potentially do just to get music culture in the school?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — I am not sure of the syllabus documents in Victoria but I am assuming that you possibly have the same — you could possibly enlighten me. Do you have the same structure of a set curriculum and then the teachers are also given a supporting booklet that gives them modules or units of work to work with?

The CHAIR — It is something along those lines.

Assoc. Prof. KANE — I think that is the starting point for a school; for the teachers to become familiar with that supporting documentation. The other thing I think is really good is to look at the culture within the school and start to think about what kind of rich cultures they have within a school and how could they look at the musical links to the various cultures and maybe start off with something straightforward; for example, a little musical festival where classes present some music from different cultures in relation to the whole school or the classes they are working within.

I think probably if there is no music being taught at all, it would be good to bring someone in to do some professional development with the teachers just to get them familiar with the documentation, familiar with some resources and to build some confidence in terms of straightforward music teaching. I am not talking about really complex pieces of music or musical performances. There is some excellent straightforward stuff just working with beat and rhythm, louds and softs, and all sorts of things and lifting that into music that the children would be familiar with.

Probably I think the first few steps would be, number one, giving the teachers some initial input, and number two, looking at the cultures within the school and how can we start off with something bright and engaging and link the students, the teachers and the families into that in some kind of mini-festival or some kind of performance or whatever it might be. I think in a place where there is no music happening at all, that may be a really good spot to bring in someone who is a music specialist to just develop a program of work for the teachers that is achievable. I think we always have to keep thinking about let us experience success and success will build confidence.

The CHAIR — Lastly, in terms of other organisations that are doing things, have you had experience where either not-for-profit groups or for-profit groups have come into schools to provide some initial programs and at the same time do some ‘train the teacher’ elements as well?

Assoc. Prof. KANE — Yes, I think that is a great idea. We have the wonderful Musica Viva program; that is fantastic. That is a very good thought — to bring music into the school to get the students interested. There are
some fabulous percussion and drumming groups and people who come in and do great work with the children, so that is certainly well worth thinking about.

When you asked that question it made me think that if you have schools where there is no musical culture at all, the other thing to think about is sending the teachers or providing an opportunity for the teachers to work with some of the specialised groups that work with straightforward primary music, like the Orff Association, Kodály or some of those groups that run teacher workshop program. They are often very good programs to get teachers engaged. Usually teachers will walk away from those programs with not only a whole set of ideas but sometimes a whole set of songs and pieces of music that they can work with. It is kind of like a resource kit that they take with them.

The other thing to think about is for schools that have access to none of these things is to actually provide them with some kind of basic resource kit that teachers could work with. That may be a set of basic percussion instruments and some linked resources or whatever. I think that would be valuable as well.

**The CHAIR** — Finally, are those types of resource kits available in New South Wales?

**Assoc. Prof. KANE** — You can buy them through musical education supply companies. You can get a percussion kit that you can take into school.

**The CHAIR** — But there are no materials that the government supplies or directs people to?

**Assoc. Prof. KANE** — I am not sure; I really do not know the answer to that one. Not that I know of, but it may not necessarily be the case that there are not any.

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Assoc. Prof. KANE** — But I think that is the place to start. Percussion is something that most people can work with, and I think that could be a really good starting point.

**The CHAIR** — Jan, we have come to the end of our questions. Is there anything that you want to add that we have not already covered or anything that you think is important for us to know?

**Assoc. Prof. KANE** — I read some notes about this Hong Kong solution, which I covered in some ways, where teachers specialise in three or four subjects. Is that still part of your deliberations?

**The CHAIR** — Yes, that has been suggested. Do you have any further information that you wanted to provide on that?

**Assoc. Prof. KANE** — I just wanted to make a comment related to that. While it seems really sensible and sounds like a good idea to have teachers who choose to specialise in three or four subjects — and therefore the whole curriculum is taught by three teachers, for example — my feeling is that I would not be going down that track. It could be good if you had a great team that worked really well together, but my feeling is that having a generalist classroom teacher is an important component of primary schooling. I think we take a really holistic view when we look at primary school; we are looking at developing the whole child. I think that sense of one teacher as a focal point is really important to develop a sense of community within the classroom. The other thing in New South Wales, certainly in the Parramatta diocese of the Catholic education system, is a move to what they call agile learning spaces. That is where classes are put together across grades.

**The CHAIR** — Right.

**Assoc. Prof. KANE** — We are finding that that has many positives. But in terms of teaching — and this is just my opinion — unless the teams of teachers are really well matched so that they work really effectively together, it is not as successful as when you have a single teacher with the classroom who gets to know those students incredibly well and who works with them to develop each student’s potential. I am more of a believer in that approach.

**The CHAIR** — Excellent. Jan, thank you very much for making yourself available today and for your submission and the work that you have been doing. It is very refreshing for us to hear your views and what you
have been doing. The primary sector is a particular area we need to get a better handle on. We appreciate your
time today, and good luck with the rest of your work.

Assoc. Prof. KANE — Thank you very much. I really appreciate the opportunity. It is wonderful to see
music being focused on at such a high level, and I wish you every success in your deliberations and work as
well.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. Have a good rest of the day.

Committee adjourned.