CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 27 March 2013

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Professor B. Caldwell, Managing Director and Principal Consultant, and
Dr T. Vaughan, former Senior Consulting Researcher and Director of Impact Studies, Educational Transformations.
The CHAIR — Thank you, Brian and Tanya, for joining us today. You are well aware of why we are here. The Education and Training Committee has been tasked with looking at music programs within schools. There are just a couple of things to point out. The information today is being recorded by Hansard. You will have the opportunity to view the transcript at a later date; if there are any typographical errors or what have you, you will be able to make those changes. The other thing is that the evidence you give today is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. So feel free to speak your mind, but of course that does not apply to anything that is said outside of the hearing proper. We will open it up for you to give an introductory statement, and then we will go into questions.

Prof. CALDWELL — Thanks, Mr Southwick, for the invitation to follow up the submission of Educational Transformations to the committee. I am joined today by Dr Tanya Vaughan, who is a former Senior Consulting Researcher and Director of Impact Studies at our company, Educational Transformations. Dr Vaughan is now Senior Project Officer in school leadership at the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Tanya was our chief researcher for the research reported in our submission and is co-author of our book *Transforming Education Through the Arts*. I should say that neither Tanya nor I are employed in the arts industry; we are scientists by background, and our work which was commissioned by The Song Room, representatives of which appeared just now, has concluded. Tanya, though, is concluding an impact study on the impact of programs offered in schools by Bell Shakespeare.

By way of introduction I would simply highlight the recommendations and conclusions we had in our submission. We believe that Australia may well be in breach of UNESCO’s Convention on the Rights of the Child in respect to opportunities for participation in the arts. Therefore we believe that public and private resources should be committed to ensure that every student at every level of schooling has an opportunity to participate in arts education, including and especially music education.

The second point we made is that there is incontrovertible national and international evidence of the benefits of participation in arts education, including music education — indeed, it may well be more powerful for music education than in any other field in the arts — not only from the intrinsic merits of participation in arts education but also the benefits it brings more widely to learning and personal and social wellbeing. We believe that arts education, including music education, should form part of the curriculum of every school, and we think it is critical that the arts component of the Australian Curriculum should be implemented in every school.

I think our research in primary schools in highly disadvantaged settings has already been recorded as part of The Song Room submission. Indeed our research summary was attached to The Song Room submission, as we have accessed it. The research that we conducted, led by Dr Vaughan, indicated that students may gain up to a year in NAPLAN scores in reading if they participate in arts education. That is one of the rare examples that we have come across and have participated in where it was virtually controlled research, because we were looking at the impact of arts education in a group of schools and we compared certain outcomes with those for schools that were identically matched in the same communities, with the same demographic profile of students.

When we look at the millions of dollars that are spent on trying to improve literacy and numeracy with little or no effect across the country — there are exceptions for particular schools, but across the country hundreds of million dollars have been spent on a variety of programs trying to improve literacy and numeracy with minimal impact. If the findings in our research can be generalised across the country, we really ought to be achieving a better balance in our public funding for arts education, including music education, and there is no reason why the conclusion that we draw would not apply to Victoria as to any other setting across the country.

The fourth conclusion with recommendations that we made in our submission is that clearly we can only make progress if there are partnerships of organisations and institutions in the public and private sectors. They are important, and there should be a substantial increase in funding for those in the private, not-for-profit sector, such as The Song Room, that provide the programs that were the focus of the research that we conducted. So clearly there is substantial private investment in not-for-profit organisations. On
information that I have, which is not up to date to this minute, I think that public investment in the private, not-for-profit sector falls far short of what it ought to be if we are really serious about becoming a top tier nation in school education, so public support for the not-for-profit sector is as important as private support.

That is our introductory statement, and we would be happy to answer questions. With those that relate specifically to the research I will defer to my colleague Dr Vaughan, who can provide the detail there.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for that. I declare that we have had a conversation before, and I wanted to pick up on an element of that. You mentioned about the research in NAPLAN and the potential advancement for those that actually undergo arts programs such as music. Could you explore that for the Hansard record in terms of what is the current practice that you are aware of within schools that are not afforded arts programs when they may have issues in literacy and numeracy in being potentially pulled out when the arts program may be taking place, so in fact they are losing that opportunity because they are getting extra help with maths and whatever else? Can you comment on some of that?

**Prof. CALDWELL** — I do not have data on the extent to which the phenomenon that you have described applies. We did observe that — and Tanya will provide the detail — on programs in the schools that we visited, on days when the program in the arts was offered, attendance was up to 20% higher. So one can mount an argument that the improvement in the literacy might well be due to the fact that these children were simply attending school on those days. But in relation to the phenomenon that you described where students in a school that does not offer a program with specialist arts teachers, such as trained professional artists, who are pulled out for particular coaching will be robbed of an experience that not only is one that they find engaging and enjoyable, with the impacts that we have described, but also is one that will develop some of the other capacities that participation in the arts foster, such as teamwork, creativity and problem solving, the international research is really quite unqualified in terms of describing those as an outcome of participation in the arts. Tanya might want to comment on the engagement issue.

**Dr VAUGHAN** — If I can provide a bit more detail around the absenteeism and drop in absenteeism that we saw on a Song Room days, I will look at the cohort that formed this book, which was 370 students from some of the most disadvantaged schools in western Sydney. Looking at them, we saw that there was a reduction in absenteeism of 65% on a Song Room day in comparison to a school that was not participating.

And then, just to add more to that, when we looked at The Song Room program last year we undertook a study in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities involving over 1000 students with eight schools looking at Years 3, 4 and 5, in an urban, regional and remote setting in Queensland that were engaged in the program. What we also found with them, which is quite remarkable, was 67 per cent less absenteeism on a Song Room day. We found that reproducibility, which always lends further evidence and reinforces the findings of the first study. Through that, the fact that students are attending more if they are in the music programs that are being offered, they are going to have the greater experience than of just school engagement and attending classes.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of the actual learning, if a child is being withdrawn out of, potentially, music programs because they need assistance in maths or science, then there is potentially the opportunity for them not to gain what music has to offer in the addition of that learning. What was traditionally being said was, ‘Let’s take your kid out’ when it was either sport or music, or something that might not be considered to be as crucial to them, and give them more maths and science; that would be completely adverse to your findings, apart from what music provides; is that correct?

**Dr VAUGHAN** — Yes, correct.

**Prof. CALDWELL** — Yes, that would be serious. Actually going to an international setting here — and it is reported in our book — the withdrawal of students to ensure that they understand a concept or can catch up is a good practice. If we look at a country like Finland, where the gap between low and high-performing students is quite narrow, one of the key explanations why they are doing so well is that they will not allow a student to fall behind in literacy and numeracy by more than 48 hours; 14% of their
teachers are available on call, literally, with a pager to go to a classroom to help a student catch up. But the other feature of school education in Finland is that they have a broad curriculum and there is no way that they would sacrifice participation in an arts program with respect to teachers who have been trained in the arts.

I would add the same thing: I spent some time in schools in Shanghai just two weeks ago, and the two are not mutually exclusive. I saw some of the most vibrant programs in music and the arts that I have ever seen in primary schools in a primary school I visited in Shanghai. They have clearly defined times where they are engaged in what we call literacy and numeracy. We cannot generalise in relation to Shanghai because its population is the same as Australia, but I was assured that all primary schools have trained music teachers, often one or two for a school of a 1000. The phenomenon that you described, Chair, is really, to the extent that it occurs, regrettable. We could expand that argument by further reference to best practice internationally.

Ms TIERNEY — My question flows from the answer that you have just given — that is, the appreciation of music and the body of evidence that we now have that demonstrates the positive impact. Why is it, in your view, that the learnings from that evidence have not been translated into all schools wanting to offer, or that do offer, a strong music and arts program?

Prof. CALDWELL — What you have described is an international phenomenon, and in our book we describe a review of primary education in England where the arts have been sidelined despite the kind of evidence that I have described. It is under threat; especially if there are budget constraints, it seems that the arts are the first to suffer despite this evidence.

We are in a really difficult climate at the moment because we have, as I mentioned before, hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on intensive coaching of students and coaching of teachers. It is very difficult to take a public position against those kinds of priorities because how can you mount a public position against efforts to try to improve literacy and numeracy?

Regrettably I think Australia has, like some other countries, fallen victim to what Pasi Sahlberg in Finland described as the GERM, the global education reform movement, that involves intensive and excessive testing that is distorting the curriculum and running counter to, really, what teachers know is a desirable feature of a balanced curriculum. I think that, yes, some progress has been made. Peter Garrett, when he was the federal arts minister, was an early mover in making sure that the arts were going to be part of the Australian Curriculum. The federal minister is now under pressure to take action and spend lots of money on traditional, sharply focused demands for improvements in literacy. It is going to require the most powerful advocacy to establish or re-establish the arts, especially when we make international comparisons with countries like Singapore or Shanghai or Finland that are at the top tier. We are aspiring to do as well for our students as those countries, and they would not sacrifice the arts.

Even a country like Venezuela with its El Sistema program, which is a remarkable program for engaging students in the most impoverished communities in the arts, puts us to shame, with one of its leading graduates now the director of the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra. So it is a powerful advocacy front outlining the powerful evidence that is going to be needed to counter what you have described, Ms Tierney.

Ms TIERNEY — What is the scope in terms of approaching it from trying to utilise music as a vehicle into other areas of the curriculum?

Prof. CALDWELL — In all of the evidence that we have found — and Tanya has trawled the evidence nationally and internationally — the findings on the connection with music are among the most powerful that one can find in terms of activities we can engage students in and the kinds of outcomes that we regard as essential in the 21st century, if not forever. That is why in the early years of primary and the early years of secondary it is a must for students to participate.

But we acknowledge that there are other activities that students can engage in that will bring them to school more often, including well-designed and implemented programs in sport, for example. That has
really dropped off in many of our government schools in recent decades. In fact we have an intriguing case study of Dandenong High School in the book. It is a school of 2000 students, with 78 different languages spoken at home, that offers an extraordinary program in the arts, including a partnership with Opera Australia, but it also has remarkable programs in sport, which appeals very much to boys. It is interesting, as I was advised by the former principal, that attendance goes way up on the days when the arts programs are offered and it also goes way up on the day that sports programs are offered for boys, especially in rugby since a large number of those students are South Pacific islanders. On days when both are offered the attendance is remarkable. So there are many different activities that can increase the engagement of students. But the evidence about music education, I must say, as an independent researcher, when I have seen the evidence I just have to say it is very hard to argue against it.

Mr ELASMAR — How does music help to close the educational gap between high and low-performing students?

Dr VAUGHAN — Looking at the evidence that we presented in this book, *Transforming Education through the Arts*, of the 10 schools in western Sydney we had three that were in a 6-month program, three that were in a 12 to 18-month program and four that were control schools. Looking at those schools, in those that had been involved in the longer term program we saw a gain in literacy achievement, as compared to the control group, of a year. It is a remarkable effect size of 0.77. It is just remarkable for any program to have that type of size of effect. That would really bring them right into a normal level of literacy achievements, and out of disadvantage. When we looked in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities we saw that there was a more than 20% gap close in reading and a 17% gap close in writing. We compared this to current initiatives. We looked at the ACARA data for the same set to see if there was not any unusual patterns over that time, and there were not. It was 18-fold more successful than what was currently running in that state to close those gaps.

These are remarkable findings beyond what we were expecting to find as researchers because of the time in the program, but the longer the time in the program the bigger the effect. We also saw at least one gain in half a year in academic achievement in science and technology as measured through the grades in New South Wales standard measuring.

Prof. CALDWELL — If I can just add an observation here, I participated in one of the case studies of one of these highly disadvantaged schools. This is observational, but is from talking with students. I could see the level of engagement of students who were participating in these programs, including music, almost physically as well as emotionally; they were totally engaged and switched on and clearly loved the experience. I had the opportunity to see some of those students in a regular classroom shortly thereafter because I was waiting to talk to one of the teachers. It was almost as though I was looking at a different group of students because they were not as engaged in their learning. The good thing is that they were actually at school on that day and they were engaged in another way, so there is an emotional connection that is well researched, as has been the connection between participation and practice in music and the development of the brain. The authoritative evidence is set out in our book there. So it is musical experience, but this idea of engagement of the whole person in the experience, it has to be noted, is actually quite remarkable.

Ms MILLER — How do you think we find the balance between the curriculum in, say, music, dance and other forms of the visual arts?

Prof. CALDWELL — The balance?

Ms MILLER — Yes.

Prof. CALDWELL — It is a hard one to develop in our current climate because we just have been so infected with, if I may use Pasi Sahlberg’s language, the GERM. We have various items of the curriculum that have been sidelined. Whilst I am supportive of the Australian curriculum, it is going to be extremely difficult to fully implement all of the aspects of the Arts curriculum in all of our schools, given the priorities that we have placed in other areas.
Ms MILLER — Do you think putting a specialist into, say, every classroom or every aspect of the arts would sort of address that or bridge the gap?

Prof. CALDWELL — I think that would be a means of achieving it. The preparation of teachers who work in primary schools, for example, for the most part only gives cursory attention to their skills to lead students in a music program. One does need trained specialists, and that is where The Song Room has stepped in because it has had professional artists working side by side with teachers. That is what I observed in Shanghai. I went out of my way to ask about the number of trained teachers in schools — teachers trained in, I specifically said, music. The answer was two in that school of 1000, but it could be pro rated across the other schools. In many respects I think the sort of observation we are making would ring true to most school principals and most teachers — the importance of a balance in the curriculum — but they are under extraordinary pressure. In many cases the jobs of principals are on the line with their NAPLAN scores and where they sit on the My School website. These are important indicators, but they are under very strong pressure to maintain the current focus and not get the balance that I think every educator knows is profoundly important.

Ms MILLER — Following on from that, how adequately do you believe the pre-service teaching courses prepare primary school teachers to deliver music education?

Prof. CALDWELL — I am the former Dean of Education at The University of Melbourne, so that is a tough question.

The CHAIR — That’s why we ask them!

Prof. CALDWELL — I appreciated that and I have reflected about that often. At the time I was Dean, to 2004, we were reflecting demand in the areas of arts education for the preparation of teachers who were going to teach in secondary schools. We had a partnership with the conservatorium of music, another faculty of the university, but the level of preparation for those in the arts was low due to demand at the time, even though we had very able people who were specialists in the arts. At The University of Melbourne, if I could keep to that university, we did have a priority for the appointment of a professor in arts education, and since then there have been two appointments: the graduate school of education was the first university department to appoint a professor of arts education. Now there is a second one to succeed him, but I think armed with the kind of evidence that we now have the case for dramatically rebalancing the way we prepare our teachers is just so powerful.

Mr CRISP — You talked about public-private partnerships in your submission, and we are interested to know: what kinds of partnerships are most beneficial to music education, and how should these be supported by government?

Prof. CALDWELL — I do not like the term, but the arts industry is one of the most significant industries in Australia. We have highly talented musicians and dancers and visual artists and those who participate in drama embedded in the community, so the days in the past where a government school would be relatively isolated from its community and not draw on the resources of the community ought to now be replaced by a model of schooling that draws on the resources of the community — as, for example, Meadows Primary School does with its partnership with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, which I have had the opportunity to observe and is very impressive indeed. What The Song Room has done is captured that partnership right across the spectrum of the arts and therefore is able to engage professional artists, broadly defined, who work side by side with teachers in the schools where it offers its programs, but we need even stronger partnerships in this field, as we do in every other field.

In another book I have co-authored — it will be published coming up — we describe a vision of schooling that should be more like life. It should not be an isolated school — bricks and mortar divorced from its community. As soon as one embraces that vision for schooling, you are much more engaged with an area of human activity that almost defines our humanity, and that is the arts and music and drama and the like. Those kinds of partnerships, which we are starting to see and celebrate, really should be just the tip of the iceberg, in our view. That is the position we outline and conclude the book with.
The CHAIR — And that is a great place for us to wrap up. We want to thank you very much for your contribution with the submission, the research and coming today to present your information. Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.