CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne — 9 April 2013

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Witnesses
Dr D. Joseph, Senior Lecturer,
Mrs F. Phillips, Associate Lecturer, and
Mrs J. Grenfell, Lecturer, School of Education, Deakin University.
The CHAIR — Thank you for appearing before the committee. You know what we are here for: to hear all about your endeavours at Deakin in supporting music education.

For the purposes of the process today, firstly, Hansard is recording the evidence you give and you will have an opportunity to review the transcript and ensure that we have captured it properly.

The other element I need to point out is that the evidence you give is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege afforded to members of Parliament. That applies to the hearing itself, not anything that is said outside of these four walls.

We will give you the opportunity for a brief opening statement, and then we have some questions for you, and so I hand over to you.

Dr JOSEPH — We are welcoming of this inquiry you have put forward and we thank you for inviting us from Deakin University to explain further what we have presented in our documentation to you in regard to what we offer in terms of teacher education for music graduates exiting and those coming in as postgraduates. We are very much at the forefront of teacher change and also inclusive education where music is core in terms of what we provide as providers of education and also in the curriculum at schools.

Mrs PHILLIPS — My name is Fiona Phillips, and I grew up in the Western District of Victoria. I have a history in understanding and knowledge of the difficulties that are a part of delivering music education regionally and rurally. I taught as a travelling music specialist. I travelled around to schools that had small numbers of students and then I came to the university. I am just giving a little bit of history so that you understand where some of the comments and the research comes from. I have an interest in making sure that regional and rural Victorians have access to quality music education.

I think Deakin University has a history in providing community-based education. We have an Institute of Koorie Education that was just recently opened by the government. We also have a history in distance education. We used to be known for the ‘Deakin difference’; now we are ‘Deakin worldly’. Those are things that really attracted me to Deakin as a place of further education. They are still things that I think are particularly special about what we provide in terms of music education.

Mrs GRENFELL — Music education is one of the core curriculum units within an arts education framework which runs across three of our core courses — early childhood, primary education and secondary education. We also have had a long involvement in Koorie education which started in the 1980s with the D-BATE program which was a partnership between Deakin University and Batchelor College. Out of that grew the Koorie Institute, which is what Fiona was referring to: the opening of a new building which is absolutely fantastic, for Koorie education.

But what I would like to focus on is that in our pre-service program we have an elective strand of core music units that our students can undertake as electives within their degree. We also have two arts education units that have a really strong music component within them so that our students, if they elect to engage in music education, actually have eight units available to them in a 32-unit major in our pre-service program.

We are very committed to training and working with our students to provide them with a very strong underpinning for teaching music in primary schools. The one thing I think we need to do, and we have begun to do through a number of professional development initiatives, is to start to work with teachers who are already in schools to upskill and to give them support to enable them to teach as generalist classroom teachers with a music focus but also to support music specialist teachers. It is really important that we develop those programs so that our teachers have ongoing professional development.

I know there are a range of PD activities offered by a number of other associations and institutions, and that is really important, but our core business is training teachers. I think that we should have ongoing and further education for teachers who are in the field.
The CHAIR — I am going to pick up on a few of those things you just mentioned. Firstly, we have heard today that for many of the teachers in schools who are wanting or needing further qualifications there is not the flexibility around to undertake that further qualification. Is that something that Deakin has looked at?

Mrs GRENFELL — Yes. As you know, Deakin is one of the leaders in the field of distance education and we have a really strong online presence, but we also have what we call ‘located learning’. We have developed a model of students working in their own areas, and it could be country Victoria. We have students overseas and interstate who access our online study materials. But then we offer them what we call an intensive or a located learning experience where, if possible, we would run intensive programs for students to come on campus. This is a model that we have developed for a long period of time. It allows teachers to stay in their communities and to upskill their qualifications.

We have a very strong focus on using e-technologies and using Skype and Jabber. We have virtual worlds and a whole range of ways in which we can develop simulated experiences for our students. The whole idea is to engage our teachers to upskill and to give them really strong, professional experience.

Dr JOSEPH — I think the point we are also trying to get across to our pre-service teachers coming in is that teaching is lifelong. The learning aspect of that is a lifelong experience and continuing one’s study as a teacher is essential to one’s personal and professional growth and development.

The CHAIR — Could I pick up on primary school teaching and ask who do you think should be teaching music in primary schools, given that we have had a lot of information in terms of submissions from people that suggest that specialist teachers should be teaching versus general classroom teachers? I know your opening comments suggested that you can get generalist teachers, if you like, equipped to do that. But who in your opinion is best equipped to teach kids music at primary school level?

Dr JOSEPH — I think teachers who have had a full four years of training and are specialists in the area of music education. It is too much to ask of a generalist teacher to give that specialism at core grassroots level, say from early childhood, which then continues into primary and into secondary — that flow-on. The generalist person gets, in terms of what we offer at Deakin, two units, which is shared under the umbrella of the Arts. It is not a pure music discipline unit only; we are sharing that space with visual arts and dance and drama now, of course. As you know, that is also part of our performing arts.

But the core business for music educators at primary level is to get that full and proper understanding and the theoretical underpinnings of what good music practice is about, not just instrumental teaching but classroom music where children make music together. It is essential then that for just the select few who are looking like they are budding performers, who are coming up as perhaps professionals or wanting to take on instrumental lessons that are extra, that that is what the specialist teacher gives. But I think all children need the experience and the expertise of a good — I do not like using the word ‘trained’ — educated person in the area of music education for primary.

The CHAIR — Are you suggesting that is the ideal?

Dr JOSEPH — That is the ideal, but obviously within the four-year current course that we have we do not have them across the four years. We have them only for 2 units in a 32-unit course, so that is the ideal. But what we are currently giving generalist teachers is the opportunity to know what and how to teach music through other areas of the curriculum. It should not be just something that is seen as a single unit outside the curriculum, it should be core within the whole school program.

The CHAIR — Great.

Ms MILLER — Following on from comments made earlier about balancing music and the curriculum, which you touched on briefly, how much time in the curriculum do you think schools should allocate to music on a weekly basis? The second part to that question is what is the optimal balance in the curriculum between music and other art forms such as the visual arts, dance, music, and so on?
Dr JOSEPH — I think we are dealing with a crowded curriculum. Everyone is fighting for a space and a place on the curriculum, and all in my opinion should be seen as being as important as literacy, numeracy, maths or sciences. All the arts forms are just as important as well. Ideally each child should have class music at least once a week — a minimum of once a week.

Mrs PHILLIPS — I would like to say something in response to the previous question in relation to my experience when I have been out visiting student teachers on teaching rounds. I am often out there to go and see what is going on as well and to keep abreast of what is going on in schools in terms of music education. Quite often what I witness is that instrumental teachers who are really good at music have been employed by the school to come in and take what is known as ‘a bit of instrumentation on the side’ and then what has happened is that they have developed a relationship with the school and then that teacher has become responsible for teaching classroom music. That has happened because there has not been anyone who is game enough to take it on, and there has not been the confidence and capacity developed within the teachers — the classroom teacher and the generalist teachers — to take on that and there has not been any money or funding from the school to pursue a music specialist who, in my opinion, would be one of the best people to do that.

So it has fallen to this person. The problem with that lies in the fact that that person does not have an ideal knowledge of how children develop. They do not have an ideal knowledge of what the teaching classroom is, and so there are a lot of mistakes and a lot of ill-prepared people in charge of developing music education within a school. They may have the musical knowledge, but they do not have the knowledge of children, of behaviour modification, of class control, of reporting, of assessment for, as and of learning. They do not know how to make a connection to the rest of the curriculum.

There are so many ways in which music underpins numeracy and literacy. We sometimes have a very staid idea of what numeracy and literacy is. Music is such an abstract form of numeracy. It develops as the rhythm that we have in languages. It is a cultural transmission. There is so much that is held within the language of music. It is a higher order thinking. It is an imaginative art form; it is a temporal art form. It is also very much a way of developing the whole feeling of the classroom. If you use music well in your classroom you can reach a number of students.

So my answer to the question ‘What is the ideal?’ would be a music specialist. And as to the balance, I agree with Dawn that they would need to get at least one hour of music per week.

Ms TIERNEY — But is there scope in terms of current people in the system?

Mrs GRENFELL — I would like to say something. There are two aspects to learning in music. One is learning in the Arts, and the other is learning through the Arts. As a result there is a place for the specialist teacher, and in the ideal situation we would have specialists in every field. But the reality of the situation is that the majority of classroom teachers would be the people who would be engaged in teaching music in the classroom. For me, it is not one or the other; it is both.

If you have a music teacher in a primary school, that person can actually offer a leadership role to enable classroom teachers to also work with children, to engage them in exploring ideas, using music as the vehicle. So then it is not one or the other; it is both. The music specialist teacher can provide that leadership for other teachers and provide PD within the schools. I think one of the things that is so important is that we have ongoing development of our teachers to develop expertise, which then engages the children in those learning experiences. As I have said earlier, there is a role for the specialist teacher, but there is a role for the generalist teacher as well, and we need to have those two aspects in our schools.

The CHAIR — Dealing with the issue that we have now in that a number of schools have no music programs whatsoever and certainly no specialist teachers, what strategies would you suggest to at least give primary school teachers the confidence and some skills to teach them some form of music at a primary school level?
Dr JOSEPH — A number of professional music organisations offer ongoing professional development, and if you are a registered teacher through VIT you have to undertake 100 hours to be accredited, to get your teacher re-accreditation, I think every five years, so there is that kind of provision for those who wish to go further. But in terms of what we could offer through Deakin University, they could come and undertake further courses with us where they would then gain further skills, knowledge and understanding in music education in order to teach in the general classroom where they would teach integrated, where it is a whole-of-school approach.

If we have more music within our courses, at least some of those teachers would then teach and be a mentor to some of the other teachers within the school, but if there is no-one there to teach, it is rather sad because the sound is all around us. We live in a sonic world, and if schools have no music — there is no other word to say it — the children are not experiencing the sonic world around them.

Mrs GRENFELL — Just recently we have developed a Music in Schools project which was funded by a philanthropic trust. We developed it for the Warrnambool and district primary schools and later, in part of the project, we also engaged with secondary music teachers in the Warrnambool and district. We could see that there was a need for PD for teachers, not for teachers to come to a particular location, but for us to take the PD to the schools. Using the Warrnambool campus as a basis, Fiona, in particular, developed a series of PD days. We ran a series of PD sessions over two semesters in which we invited specialist music educators to work with a group of Warrnambool and district primary teachers who were, in the main, generalist teachers with some specialist teaching.

We were fortunate to also work in partnership with Victorian Opera and Richard Gill and we put on a children’s performance of the opera *Wunderbar*. The whole idea was to bring together the expertise that teachers have developed during this particular program that we were running for them, and to then work with the children in their schools and with educators from Victorian Opera to put on a performance.

The thing about the program also was that after the workshops that the teachers participated in they then went back to their schools and used the ideas and the skills that they had developed in those PD workshops in implementing curricula and learning experiences for the children in the classroom. They then reported back in the following week. What we are doing at the moment is putting together an e-book of all the curricula that these teachers had developed and implemented in their classrooms.

Perhaps Fiona would like to say a little bit more about it, but this is a model that we could use, along with the model that Dawn is talking about in which we think Deakin University needs to be more engaged in developing short courses that allow teachers to upskill in addition to those that are there. They would enrol in units that we have on offer and then they would be able to go on and do a higher degree, a master degree, or a PhD, so that there is ongoing sequential, in-depth, professional development happening right through their teaching career.

The CHAIR — Did you want to add anything, Fiona?

Mrs PHILLIPS — Only that it was a model of professional development that was established where curriculum content creation and co-creation of curriculum content for the classrooms they were going back to was created. What happened was that there was a demonstration lesson given by people who had taught regionally and rurally. They are things about teaching regionally and rurally that are specific to those. That was part of the success of the program: the fact that they did not have to travel. For a person from Warrnambool or Port Fairy it is a whole day of travel before they have even had to engage in any professional development. The other thing is that many of the teachers are shared music specialists, and this often means that they are not going to get ongoing professional development regionally and rurally because the shared schools are going to fight over who is going to pay for that person to get time release. Those are some of the unique problems there are in rural and regional centres.

The success of the program was that the funder backfilled those classrooms.

Dr JOSEPH — It is always the dollar.
Mrs GRENFELL — We had a grant of $228 000 to work with, which is absolutely huge.

Mrs PHILLIPS — Phenomenal.

Mrs GRENFELL — What it meant was that we could actually pay for the emergency teachers. We could release 27 teachers in Warrnambool and district schools to participate in this particular PD program. Our grant actually paid for the release of those teachers to come to Deakin to do these PD programs.

The CHAIR — Who made the grant available?

Mrs PHILLIPS — A philanthropic organisation.

Mrs GRENFELL — Yes, it was one of the Warrnambool charitable trusts. What we were doing was focusing on regional and rural teachers because, as Fiona has said, for a teacher in a rural area to do PD they normally have to come to Melbourne or to one of the larger cities like Geelong, for example. It is not just a day visit, it would be an overnight stay, which means that schools have to pay for at least three days emergency teaching. What we wanted to do was to encourage teachers to participate. We wanted to develop this as an ongoing project. We are working at the moment on ways in which Deakin can support this because there is a remarkable lack of funding for the Arts at the moment. I have to say that that is my paid party political announcement for the day.

The other thing is that we have had contact with The Song Room and other associations. We are looking to see if we can perhaps work in partnership with them. They have the most amazing way of attracting funds which we would like to know more about. There is another thing that we are working with at the moment, and I have had preliminary conversations with the CEO. The Song Room works with what they call artist educators. These people do not have a teacher-training background. What we are looking to do is to see if there are ways in which we can collaborate with them to upskill them, to develop some sort of certification to enable them to work. But I go back to the original points that we have been making, which are that we need to look at our preservice training to really have our teachers better prepared for teaching in schools.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. I know we covered in that last answer a fair bit about the rural and regional support that you offer. Gayle, you have some questions.

Ms TIERNEY — To start off, firstly there is the point you made about backfill when people need to go and have development. That came through during previous inquiries in terms of all regional disadvantage, and of course it is not just in terms of music, it is right across the board, and it is also in terms of teachers who need to bring children down to get a wider experience in terms of buses, coming to Melbourne and back, the accommodation costs and everything else. It is good that you have raised it again.

My question is — I am fairly familiar with the history of Deakin and its groundbreaking work with online teaching and distance education, but it is also a fact that people who have a regional background, whether it be their childhood or other experiences, have more of a tendency to return to the regional area. What sorts of strategies do you think could be put in place to encourage rural and regional students to actually undertake specialist music education?

Mrs PHILLIPS — One of the strategies that we had in the project — and it was interesting because they taught on the Warrnambool campus — was that I had a returning student who was now in a classroom and came back to the Music in Schools project, to PD. She is now employed as a sessional teacher at the university, so there is a fostering.

We also used in that project people who came from that area. I used a specialist music teacher who was shared to come in, and she participated not only as a participating teacher but also as what I called a field expert. I think that is one of the best ways: to honour the knowledge that exists in the place and space, and to develop the capacity and confidence in those people to continue to do that. That is one way in which you can do that, but to do that she had to be allowed to come out of and be released from her school and the place where she was.
Mrs GRENFELL — And the other thing, too, is if we want people to go into the country, we have to make the schools inviting so that people really want to go into the country. Things like having ongoing PD which happens in that region or in that environment is a really important aspect of keeping teachers within schools, giving them all the opportunities that you may have in a larger regional city or in the city itself.

We need to think of really exciting ways of being able to say to teachers, ‘Go into the country; you will not be disadvantaged in any way’. A lot of that is to do with thinking of exciting, innovative ways in which we can engage them. Some of it is to do with using new technologies and all of those sorts of things, and we are really into that in a major sort of way, I can tell you that now.

Dr JOSEPH — May I just say that we do provide our city students as well as our Geelong, Warrnambool or waterfront students — because we have a presence in the western region — with placements in the rural area. That is something that we offer our students throughout the four-year course for primary and secondary so that when they graduate they have already had an experience out in the country that makes them want to further their stay in the country and perhaps take up a position.

We not only offer something in the city or close to their home, we place them into other areas like rural, interstate and global experiences because we firmly believe we are preparing our graduates as global teachers and not just as teachers located in Melbourne or Victoria.

The CHAIR — Unfortunately, we have run out of time. Is there anything that we have not touched on that you really wanted to say?

Dr JOSEPH — We were hoping you would maybe be asking us some more questions, but I think that is fine.

The CHAIR — We have covered a great deal today. Thank you for the work that you do, and certainly for appearing before the committee and the information you have presented to us. Keep up the great work at Deakin.

Witnesses withdrew.