

Sarah Brooke
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Dear Members of the Parliamentary Committee,

RE: Submission to the Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools

I write this submission as someone greatly concerned about the state of music education in Victoria. I write also with a heavy heart that in my lifetime I am unlikely to see every child in every school in Victoria receive the sort of music education that can enhance their lives, and one that has enhanced mine. But I do write with an optimism that things can be changed, and that there is a will and determination by many to fight for this change, as seen by the emotive writing in the submissions. I believe that a quality music education has immeasurable benefits to our society and that this is worth the fight.

Evidence supporting music education in schools

There is an abundance of research that outlines the benefits of music education to a child, her family, her school and the broader community (Colwell & Davidson, 1996; Črnčec, Wilson, & Prior, 2006; Darby & Catterall, 1994; Demorest & Morrison, 2000; Ewing, 2011; MENC, 1999; Pascoe et al., 2005; Schellenberg, 2006; Yoon, 2000). My experience lies with classroom music education, providing professional development to classroom and specialist music teachers, and in pre-service teacher education, and it is in these contexts that I comment. Although the evidence is clear that learning music assists learning in other curriculum areas, I personally believe that the justification for teaching music is supported fully by the benefits this specific area offers the learner - cognitively, personally and socially. 'We teach music because it is unique' (Gill, 2012).

The live music industry in Australia is a large and growing sector that significantly enhances our economy and there is a clear indication that careers in the music industry can be financially sustainable (DAE, 2011; SGS, 2012; Young, 2011). This is wonderful but not all students undertaking music learning will aim or hope for a career in music. However, a quality education in music can enrich us all, enhancing our wellbeing. Music can be an outlet for self-expression; it brings people together; it speaks to our hearts and it brings joy to our lives. Our recreation time (often seen as 'down' time from the complexity of our lives) can be significantly enhanced if we actively participate in music making (either in family groups, friendship groups or as part of a larger community). Most members of our society are consumers of music. Music education offers us the opportunity to learn about music, learn through music, and positive experiences in music education help us develop our aesthetic capabilities.

Current provision of music education in Victoria

It has been well documented that music education is a rather 'hit and miss' affair in Victoria primary schools (Heinrich, 2012; sMAG, 2007; Topsfield, 2012). Pre-service teachers over the years have stated their reticence in teaching music due to their own lack of music education (thereby supporting their belief in its low status in the curriculum), and their lack of confidence in their own abilities to teach music (brought about primarily by the lack of time afforded it within their tertiary degrees). This cycle of inadequate teachers of music education can only continue unless brave and significant changes are made to how we educate teachers.

Some schools recognize that they do not have the necessary expertise in their staff members to offer a program that could be appropriate. A solution to this seems to be to offer instrumental programs (user pays). Although I support these instrumental programs (particularly when all students are involved and the schools subsidise the cost to parents), this is no substitute for a classroom music program. As a teacher supporting the Orff Schulwerk approach to music education, there are possibilities for children's growth that can less easily be fostered within many of these instrumental programs. In classroom music education, all children attend – an instrumental user pays program will only attract those who are financially willing or able to subscribe. In an Orff classroom, children are provided with many opportunities to be creative and improvise – something not always seen in instrumental programs. Within a child's grade there is the opportunity to be part of a community of music learners, developing the social and personal learning skills necessary for a life of wellbeing. This too can be said of instrumental programs where learners are brought together, but again too often this community is made up of those learners with only those families prepared to invest financially in their children. At present I believe that some schools are using these programs as a 'tick the box' measure of their music provision. These programs in fact can allow class teachers to assume no responsibility at all for the music education of their students. As a music specialist teacher in an innercity Melbourne school last year I can attest to this attitude being true. No class teacher provided music education (or music participation) to the students, relying instead on the instrumental music program. Eighty percent of children from Grade 3 were involved in this program – but what of the other twenty percent? I believe we must improve the situation for all students through classroom music education before we can consider how best to provide instrumental music programs.

In order for all children to have a quality classroom music education, teachers must be 'skilled up'. A program cannot be successful if the teacher does not herself understand about music; believe in its importance; or have an understanding of pedagogy in this specific area.

Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools

If we believe the body of research that tells us a quality music education program will have positive, sustained and far-reaching benefits for students, then the

question is how to provide such programs. A paradigm shift is needed first so that all educators, parents and the wider community are informed of this research on the benefits of music education. The government and relevant other bodies could do more to promote music education as an essential curriculum area – and one that supports students in ways that literacy and numeracy cannot. Although there are some highly successful instrumental programs in some schools, it is the demise of the classroom music education program that is of most concern.

It is unrealistic to assume that teachers with little experience, knowledge or understandings of music education, will then provide a quality classroom music program to their students. This needs to be addressed on several levels. Universities must offer much more music training to all students in their teacher education courses. At present there is an enormous discrepancy between universities with some courses offering as little as two hours specific music education to their students (which is the situation where I am currently teaching). I believe the government should mandate a more sustained and specific music education component for all pre-service teachers. Although teacher education courses must apply for VIT approval, the reality of what is approved and what actually happens within some courses can be markedly different (and I have observed this at three Victorian universities in which I have been employed to teach recently). A further issue regarding the education of pre-service teachers is the quality and skills, knowledge and expertise of those employed to teach them music. Again I know of situations within teacher education courses where those teaching music have little understanding of music education pedagogy, are unaware of various music methods or approaches, have never taught music in schools, and are not able to direct students to appropriate professional development opportunities to assist their knowledge and skills in music education. Both KMEIA (The Kodaly Music Education Institute of Australia) and VOSA (The Victorian Orff Schulwerk Association) would both be in a position to assist universities in sourcing appropriate teachers, and the resources and expertise of these associations is significantly underutilised. There are very few opportunities for students to enroll in university courses specifically designed to train music teachers – particularly at the primary school level. Although a pre-service teacher may play violin at a high level, this ability alone is not sufficient to ensure they will be a successful and appropriate classroom music teacher. Graduate courses must be offered by universities to support those who are interested in becoming specialist music teachers, and these courses must provide quality learning experiences to ensure these teachers are able to cope with the demands of such a specialist role. Those schools with quality music programs are ones that have quality specialist music teachers, and communities recognize such programs (as outlined in many of the submissions). Most independent schools are able to provide quality programs, and in fact use their music program as a window to the school. Their orchestras, choirs and instrumental groups showcase the school to the community and it is clear that there is an understanding of the value of music education to the wellbeing and growth of the student.

It is also important to address the situation in schools where teachers do not have the confidence, ability or interest in teaching music to their students. Funding must be provided to schools to support professional development of all staff in music education. As skill acquisition and understandings in music take some time to develop, this professional development needs to be ongoing. One way to promote music education, and to offer this ongoing professional development, would be for the government to invest in a body of music educators to be employed to service clusters of schools. This system was in place decades ago (the Music Branch) and many of us teaching music today came through an education system where support for teachers was provided by these experts in the field. I remember my own primary music education as the most enjoyable aspect of my schooling and in turn became a musician and music teacher as a direct result of my experiences.

My suggestions for providing quality music education to all Victorian students clearly demands an influx of funding. Our government must certainly be responsible for this, but they could consider sources beyond their own pockets. Businesses reliant on an active music industry may well see the benefits of investing in the music education of our students today.

I believe that a significant amount of change must occur if we are to provide a complete, holistic and rewarding education to our students and I commend the government for inviting submissions, and hope that some positive action can be taken. I thank the committee for the opportunity of adding to this inquiry.

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