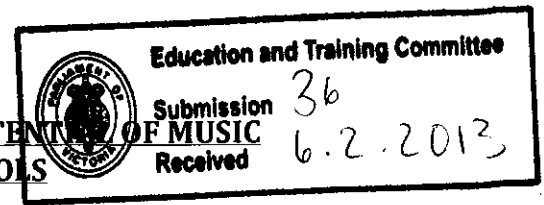


**INQUIRY INTO THE EXTENT, BENEFITS AND POTENTIAL OF MUSIC
EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS**



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Introduction

I am writing from the perspective of my own experiences both as an instrumental music teacher (of piano) at the two state primary schools named above, and as a parent of two primary-school aged children, both of whom receive private instrumental music tuition (both in school and out of school), but neither of whom receive any classroom music teaching at our local primary school (BSPS).

Music is not for the privileged few

Over my lifetime, it seems that the status of music education has been slowly eroded until now it is perceived as an extra-curricular activity for the privileged. Yet listening to music is an important part of everyday life – in the same way that people define themselves by their sporting teams, they define themselves by their tastes in music. Australians wouldn't dream of phasing out sport in schools, so why is music in schools being 'phased out'?

THE BENEFITS OF MUSIC EDUCATION

Active (not passive) music education

Like so many activities and skills, music is only learnt by 'doing'. No amount of listening to Mozart in class is actually going to teach music – it is necessary for students to actually experience 'doing' it via hands on experiences with an instrument or singing. It is only by learning how to play an instrument or sing, that students learn how to listen, analyse, read and interpret music.

Music is a literacy

Why is it currently deemed acceptable in the state school system that children learn music from non-musicians, or receive no musical training at all? We would not think very highly of an education system that allowed students to be taught reading and writing by an illiterate teacher, or learn a foreign language from someone who knew nothing of that language. So why is music treated differently?

The analogies between music and language are many – music and language involve reading and writing notation, both are self-contained means of human expression that benefit society in many far-reaching ways.

Music is a sport!

Now that got your attention! Although I do believe music *is* like sport, and should be treated like sport in schools, for reasons including the following:

- Studies have shown that there are benefits to society if every school student is encouraged to participate in some musical activity, as they are required to do with sporting activity.
- Like sport, music is learnt actively not passively – it is the ‘doing’ that is so important.
- To reach elite level in either sport or music, the required ‘deep practice’ (described in Daniel Coyle’s book *The Talent Code*) is the same.
- In both sport and music, failure is an important prerequisite to success. Both disciplines encourage the development of life skills, such as techniques of skill mastery and effective methods of practice.
- In the same way that sporting passions often become part of a person’s identity, musical taste is important to identity. We may not all be elite athletes or musicians, but having enough knowledge to follow our favourite team or band in a meaningful way is a healthy part of who we are.

Music is a science

Not only is the production of musical sound a fascinating branch of physics in itself, but learning musical notation develops mathematical skills such as pattern recognition, spatial awareness and many more. It also develops aural awareness, which aids recognition of the nuances of sound that are required in learning a foreign language, and improves learning skills such as concentration, memory, focus, reasoning and time management.

MY EXPERIENCES AND OBSERVATIONS AS A PARENT AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC TEACHER

Having a musically trained classroom music teacher

I teach piano at the above two state primary schools but, of the two, only FPS has a part-time musically trained classroom music teacher. Having taught at both schools for several years now and being able to compare the two, I believe that **having a musically trained classroom music teacher is crucial to the success of music education in schools.**

Classroom music at BPS

When my daughter first started at BPS in 2007, 45 minutes a week of classroom music was timetabled for all students, but it was taught by a teacher who is not musically trained, had never learnt an instrument, does not sing, and is musically illiterate. It was therefore a mixture of ‘music appreciation’ and ‘group karaoke’ that was being taught, with occasional more meaningful input from musically

trained parent volunteers. At that time, there was a music graduate on the teaching staff, but resources were allocated (by the non-musical principal) in such a way that she never once taught a music class during her entire time at the school.

Currently at BSPS, music is packaged with performing arts, which is again taught by a non-musician. The most exposure to music the students receive is watching video presentations, or moving to recorded music. There is no active music making on offer in the classroom, although there is a healthy instrumental music program co-ordinated by parent volunteers.

Choir at BSPS

Since my daughter started at the school in 2007, the BSPS school choir has been run by a succession of parent volunteers, including myself. This also presents a problem in that there needs to be a musically knowledgeable person in charge to appoint and oversee the volunteers. At one point the school choir was run by a musically illiterate parent who likes singing and was available at the required times which, in my opinion, is not really enough of a qualification to deliver a worthwhile musical experience and a structured progression pathway. For fear of offending that parent volunteer, the principal allowed her to remain in charge of the choir until her children left the school.

Classroom music & ensembles at FPS

In contrast, at FPS, the classroom music teacher, Vern O'Hara, champions music at the school, and the musical community there is vibrant - every child receives 1 hour of classroom music education a week, there is a wide range of instrumental/vocal tuition on offer, and the school has a large and diverse number of student ensembles, directed by Vern O'Hara or by the instrumental/vocal tutors. The school even offers instrumental music scholarships to students whose parents cannot otherwise afford instrumental music tuition.

Instrumental music at BSPS

There are eight visiting instrumental music teachers (IMTs) at BSPS covering piano, guitar, drums, woodwinds, singing, and violin. Their roster is co-ordinated by a parent volunteer. The school has two dedicated instrumental music spaces, one of which contains a 2-year-old upright Yamaha acoustic piano, which parents fund-raised for two years to buy. The school's administrative staff vet the IMTs' WWCC, and the IMTs pay the school a facilities rental fee of \$3 per hour, which is supposedly reinvested in the music programme, but in reality has only been used to maintain the piano, as the school owns no other instruments. The \$3 per hour (or pro-rata equivalent) hire fee may be passed on to the parents in full, so it is a sort of 'user pays' system, with the IMTs 'collecting' the money. The IMTs set their own fees and invoice parents directly.

Problems experienced with this model mainly relate to commitment on the part of the IMTs. As several of the IMTs are gigging musicians, one scenario that has regularly arisen in the past is that an IMT goes away 'on tour' and misses several weeks of tuition. Whilst the parent co-ordinator encourages all IMTs to find a replacement teacher for those weeks, there is no way of ensuring this actually happens.

Another problem is that the IMT jobs at BSPS have tended to be passed on from one musician to their 'mate', with no assessment as to that person's suitability for the role. For instance, two years ago the drum teacher passed the job on to his mate who discovered, once in the role, that he didn't like working with young children. He taught for two terms, during which many previously keen drum students were reduced to tears in his lessons and quit learning the drums.

Instrumental music at FPS

IMTs are paid as casual staff and are paid for the number of hours they teach each week. We are included on the payroll and receive superannuation. Vern O'Hara, the classroom music teacher, oversees the running of the instrumental music programme and appoints IMTs. The school invoices parents for a slightly higher rate than the IMTs get paid, and the difference gets re-invested in the music programme in the form of purchasing school instruments for hire and maintaining the schools' current instruments.

I believe it is vital to have a musically trained and experienced teacher at the helm of any school music program. It is necessary to have a teacher with a wide musical knowledge to select and direct appropriate musical experiences for the students, and for that teacher to have an aural and technical awareness of music to enable students to improve and progress.

OPTIMUM PROVISION OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

It all starts at primary school

Having taught piano for 15 years now, I believe that improving the standard and consistency of music education in Victorian primary schools is vital. The first opportunity many students will have to study music will be at primary school, and it is on this foundation that broader opportunities and progression pathways rest.

Every primary school should have a 'music educator' (if not a classroom music teacher)

I believe that music education could be vastly improved at primary level if every primary school has at a least one 'music educator' member of teaching staff, who is employed to teach music literacy and practical group music (e.g. Orff and Kodaly methods) in the music classroom. This 'music educator' need not necessarily be a music graduate – there are plenty of primary school teachers out there who are proficient in an instrument and who, with the right sort of professional development, could develop their skill base and confidence to include classroom music teaching.

For aspiring primary teachers, I believe that education students who can demonstrate musical abilities of around grade 5 standard at entry to their tertiary course could be sufficiently developed during their degree course to provide primary level music education.

Reform of tertiary teacher training

Education degree courses need to be adapted to provide specialist units of regular and ongoing training in methods of music education for aspiring 'music educator' primary teachers.

A new attitude for non-musical primary school principals

Part of the problem as I perceive it is that non-musical primary school principals have not been sufficiently educated as to the important role that music can play in children's academic and social development, and improving the ethos of a school.

For example, the former principal at BSPS who allowed music to be taught by a non-musician whilst the music graduate remained in the generalist classroom, was a non-musician herself and her prevailing attitude was that music was an 'extra' for parent volunteers to run, if they wanted.

I heard recently from a parent whose children are relocating to a school in the northern suburbs of Brunswick who, upon inquiring whether the school had an instrumental music program, was told by the (non-musical) principal that the school does not. The reason given by the principal was that "the government is 'discouraging' instrumental music in schools because it takes students out of the classroom, and they want every child to be in the classroom all day every day". In my opinion, I do not believe that is an acceptable position for either a principal or a government to take.

Unless the government decides '*we as a society value music education*' and forces the hand of non-musical primary principals, then the situation will continue as it is, being offered on a school-by-school basis.

<p>Primary school principals need to be educated in the benefits of music education and how to support their 'music educator' on staff.</p>
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Reform of VELs at primary level – music as a separate discipline

As a parent of primary school-aged children, it seems to me that part of the problem is music being incorporated in 'The Arts', when it should in fact be a self-contained discipline. Currently primary schools can deliver the VELs curriculum without teaching any music whatsoever. If music education remains on a school-by-school basis, many non-musical principals will continue to choose the 'easy option' non-music path. In the same way that LOTE requires students to learn to speak and be literate in another language, music should be a separate discipline that requires students to learn to play/sing and become literate in music.

Recognition/registration for instrumental music teachers

The current phasing out of the VIT's 'permission to teach' category for instrumental music teachers means that schools no longer have professional

accreditation as a reference point regarding an instrumental music tutor's teaching credentials. Many schools now only require a WWCC of their instrumental music teachers. If there is no musically knowledgeable member of school staff to oversee or appoint instrumental music teachers, then how are schools to know who is a suitably qualified and committed teacher, and who is not? I believe there needs to be a system of professional accreditation for music educators of all descriptions.

CURRENT MUSIC EDUCATION REFORM IN THE U.K.

“The importance of music – A National Plan for Music Education”

I am sure readers of this submission will be aware that the British Government is currently addressing the same issues regarding music education in schools, and last year developed the above paper outlining national reforms to music education. Many of the initiatives being implemented I believe are needed here. They include:

Reform of teacher training.

In the UK model, this includes:

- a new primary Initial Teacher Training add-on module to boost new teachers' skills and confidence in teaching music.
- a 'music educator' qualification is under development to ensure the wider music workforce (e.g. instrumental music teachers) is better skilled, and properly recognized for their role in and out of school.

The creation of new music education hubs

These hubs will provide opportunities that reach beyond school boundaries and draw in the expertise of a range of education and arts partners, such as local youth music groups, ensembles and orchestras. More children will experience a combination of classroom music teaching, instrumental and vocal tuition, opportunities to play in ensembles and the chance to learn from professional musicians. Hubs will also play an important role in offering opportunities for continuing professional development and strengthening leadership practice by encouraging leading practitioners in music education to support less experienced colleagues and to deepen knowledge throughout schools.

School-to-school support

Hubs will also facilitate school-to-school support and shared expertise. For example, some music teachers in primary schools can lack skills, whilst those in secondary schools can feel professionally isolated. To address this, some secondary schools have found it valuable to partner with their feeder primary schools to provide curriculum support, continuing professional development or ensemble opportunities.

SUMMARY

I feel extremely lucky to teach at Flemington Primary School and I would recommend it as having an exemplary music program, which benefits the school community and far beyond.

In contrast, whilst the parent community at Brunswick South Primary School is very supportive of music and values music, the general feeling is that the education system is failing families with regard to music education. There are many musicians amongst the parents at the school, who have undertaken the following volunteer activities to optimize the provision of music in the school:

- Running the school choir
- Teaching music for the school musical
- Writing band parts, coaching and performing for the school musical
- Co-ordinating the instrumental music program
- Two years of fund-raising to buy the school a new acoustic upright piano
- The school community lobbied the Department of Education for a non-template school hall design in the BER funding, so that instrumental music rooms could be included in the school hall design.

Our local state member, Jane Garrett, has attended many school functions and has seen school music in action. Parents have done everything possible to create musical opportunities for their children short of having a whip round and employing a classroom music teacher with the proceeds. And yet there is still no music taught in the classroom. It is time to put this right.

CONCLUSION

Reform is needed at many levels, as follows:

- Each school should have a musically knowledgeable 'music educator'
- Improved skill development for primary school 'music educators'
- Improved skill development at tertiary level for aspiring primary school 'music educators'
- Education of non-musical primary school principals as to the benefits of music education
- Reform of VELS to make music a separate discipline to performing arts
- Recognition/accreditation for the wider music education workforce



Anna Robinson 3/2/13