

Jemima Bunn

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To Whom It May Concern,

I am a teacher in the Eastern Metropolitan Region, having taught in both classroom and instrumental music environments, and worked as an Instrumental Music Coordinator in the EMR. Over the past 20 years of teaching, I have directing programs at two large government schools in the Eastern Region.

There are several issues involving the positioning of music in the curriculum and employment conditions that I would like considered in this review.

CLASSROOM MUSIC

Music is collectively classified under the umbrella term of *The Arts* Key Learning Area along with drama, dance, media and visual art. Perceiving very different and distinctive subjects such as music, drama, dance, media and visual art as a collective under the heading *The Arts*, discounts that the skills developed through participation and required to take part in each of these subjects are specialised and focussed. The collective title of *The Arts*, denies that each have unique qualities, knowledge, skills, language and intelligences.

Classroom music has the potential to offer students experiences that are not available in any other curriculum area; to open them to practical music making experiences, histories and cultures – their own and others expressed through an aural tradition, another literacy, creative opportunities to express through instrumental and vocal genres, and an intelligence in itself.

VELS progression marks do not reflect a student's ability in an individual subject, but an accumulation of marks across all *The Arts*, with an averaging of participation in each subject into a whole. This method of assessment neglects the unique demands of each subject in its own right and assumes that all skills are the same and transferrable. A student who excels in music may never be truly identified as their VELS mark is compared with dance, where they do not excel – showing their ability in *The Arts* to be of only an adequate standard.

To assume that learning in music is the same experience as learning in other areas classified in *The Arts* displays ignorance, and lack of understanding of the characteristics of each of the identified subjects. Demonstrative of a perfunctory regard for the potential of their contributions to individuals and education, the value of music and its distinctiveness is dismissed.

Music needs to be acknowledged in the curriculum as a subject in its own right.

THE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PROGRAM: INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC & ENSEMBLE REHEARSALS

If instrumental music and ensemble rehearsals are to be valued, they must be considered as a legitimate subject in the individualised learning plan of the students choosing to participate in the Instrumental Music Program.

The terms “co-curricular” or “extra-curricular” are common usage in Instrumental Music. Both instrumental music and ensemble rehearsals are treated as an extra rather than as part of an individualised learning plan for the students electing to take part in. Considering these areas in this way situates it on the periphery of subject hierarchy – a non-subject within a school situation with a written report. Instrumental music has long been considered under these headings, even though those involved in this area deliver a curriculum, assess student progress and write reports. Students elect to participate each year, as an enhancement and addition to their other subjects.

Ensemble playing is an essential part of instrumental music education. Balanced alongside solo work done in instrumental lessons, participating in an ensemble has powerful capabilities and provides amazing experiences for students and teachers through collective music making activities. This is evident in successful orchestral music programs such as Glen Waverley Secondary College, Camberwell High School, Blackburn High School, Bentleigh Secondary College, and Eltham High School. Ensemble rehearsals however are treated as extra or co-curricular activities. The taking of ensembles is not counted as part of a teaching load, but regarded as an extra activity for music teachers, that they are expected to undertake. Ensemble is not like a sport practice that occurs in the lead up to an event and then ceases after the event is over. Ensemble rehearsals are weekly and all year round. They require specialist knowledge and skills that are very different from teaching group and individual instrumental classes. Teacher/Conductors are required to develop skills to rehearse the ensemble and to scaffold learning for individuals and keep large number of students motivated and involved.

The real dilemma is that instrumental music is both co-curricular and delivers a curriculum with assessment. Additionally, Instrumental music is essential in the pathway to VCE Music and participation at a tertiary level. This is not so for sporting activities taken as a co-curricular or extra-curricular activities. Instrumental Music prepares students to undertake VCE subject offerings of Solo and Group Performance and develops the potential for students to undertake professional pathways as performers; sound engineers; retail music sales, composers, and educators.

Both instrumental music and ensemble rehearsal deserve the recognition as contributors to students’ educational experiences and as a legitimate subject in the individual learning programs of students.

FUNDING OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PROGRAMS

In discussing funding, I draw on my experience in positions of leadership in music programs and schools in the Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Funding in the Region has not been altered significantly in the last 20 to 25 years. Despite pay increases and teachers becoming more experienced and going up the pay scale, the pool of money available to the Region to fund Instrumental Music teachers has stayed the same. Allocation of these funds has been a kind of Tetris game with the funding shifted around the Region according to numbers of students and school investments in their Instrumental Music Program.

In the past, schools were willing to invest in instrumental music by allocating further funds to support those contributed by the Department. However, in light of the current neo liberal policies influencing schools and education, and forcing schools to run within business model structures, schools have been attempting to make Instrumental Music Education a cost neutral activity. This means that the system is becoming more reliant of on a user pays system for participation. A cost neutral approach to Instrumental Music Education makes it less accessible for many, particularly those in low income areas, and as a more elitist activity in school education.

Financial investment in Instrumental Music is needed to build quality music education programs, and increase the possibilities of participation by a broader level of people.

VIT

I am particularly concerned about the changes to *Permission to Teach* that took effect at the beginning of 2011, and the implications of such changes for the delivery and quality of Instrumental Music Education in Victoria. I refer you to <http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/changes/faq/ptt.aspx> for an outline of the changes.

The changes infer that Instrumental Music may not be considered a legitimate subject in the School curriculum. Under these changes, teachers of instrumental music with and without teaching qualification are having their employment conditions changed because the implications are that what they are doing is not teaching.

I assert that Instrumental Teachers are undertaking the duties of a teacher in the subject area as they are required to teach curriculum, assess activities, and write reports. Instrumental Teachers are also often required to take ensembles before and after school and may have 60 – 80 students involved – a requirement of being in the Instrumental Program. Instrumental Music Teachers often have close relationships with their students, because of the small numbers in which they meet, and the conversations that come up because of the teaching environment. Instrumental Teachers often observe issues with students that are not picked up in larger classes of twenty-six. As I read and interpret the correspondence, you could have an unqualified, unregistered teacher observe a student who is cutting themselves, or who has bruises in the wrong places and not be obligated to say anything because they are not teachers and are exempted from mandatory reporting. Whilst a specialist hip-hop dance coach may be brought into teach a unit on dance and not be VIT registered, the usual teacher is still in the room, supervising. In the case of an Instrumental Teacher, they are the usual teacher.

An unqualified, unregistered teacher could be alone at school at 7.15am and be responsible for rehearsing an ensemble of 60+ students. Unqualified, unregistered teachers could go on camps or tours and be asked to take responsibility for students as part of the required ratio – yet have no direct training in supervising students. This concerns me. It would be easy to say that these people should not be given responsibility, however, to do so means that such activities would not be able to run.

As a VIT registered teacher, I feel that my area of teaching and expertise has been down-graded to second class by the changes to *Permission to Teach*. I am a qualified and experienced teacher who

feels that the VIT has turned their back on me and my subject area. I am supportive of having qualified teachers teach our students and support the development of professional standards, however, the changes infer the opposite - that Instrumental Music is no longer a subject and that you don't have to be qualified to teach it. The *Changes to Permission to Teach* and subsequent changes to Legislation, threaten the standard and professionalism of instrumental music teaching.

The wording of the *Changes* is ambiguous in the way they can be interpreted. If a Principal decides that instrumental music will be defined as not a real subject, school budgets can save money. To a certain extent it could be in the best interest of the school budget to employ instrumental teachers as instructors. This directly correlates to the standard of teaching and who will apply to work in such conditions.

Many instrumental music teachers work in multiple schools; some often teach classroom and instrumental music, two very different teaching methods. At some schools they are told they do have to be registered, at others they are told they do not. The designation of instrumental music as a subject or not reflects on teachers pay levels, opportunities for promotion, and superannuation benefits.

There have been several incidences where teachers have been advised by VIT that they do not have to be registered because they are considered to be instructors and not teachers if they are involved in instrumental music. They have been refused VIT registration. My interpretation of the *Changes* and word from the VIT suggest that they have no jurisdiction to make such assertions over the regulation of professionals.

The implications of the *Changes to Permission to Teach* are far reaching. By changing the legislation, the VIT has inadvertently implied the possibility for differing conditions of employment within a full time government school allocation. Some qualified teachers are being told that they will now not have to be registered and be paid on a different pay rate.

I am a supporter of professional standards for all teaching staff. The contentious issue here is that the VIT has offered opportunity for instrumental music to not be considered a subject, when clearly it is. I do not find it satisfactory outcome that the VIT should support such changes that bring into question the validity of the instrumental teaching and its status within the teaching profession. Instead of demanding that unqualified teachers upskill and become qualified, the VIT has opened the way for unqualified instructors to teach instrumental music.

These concerns are shared by many of my contemporaries. We have sought meetings with the VIT, having written to them several times. As yet, it has been very difficult to get any comment or discussion on these concerns. We have been told that a panel of music educators were involved in working through the changes in teacher registration for Instrumental teachers, but cannot find out who they are. The network of teachers in this area is quite small and well integrated – you would think that someone we knew had been consulted whether from ABODA, AMUSE, AUSTA, ANCA, KMIEA, ADMIS or the Regions.

It is essential that the changes in VIT legislation be altered to demand professionalism from all teachers, and that instrumental music be considered a subject.

Thanks for listening

Jemima Bunn