



ATTN: Mr David Southward MP
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

14 February 2013

Dear Executive Officer

Please find below our submission to the Parliament of Victoria Education and Training Committee's inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian Schools.

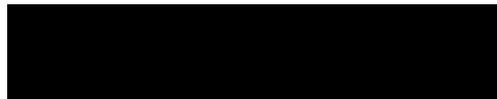
We urge you to redress the current parlous state of music education in Victorian schools, and increase funding for quality programs to help ensure that no Victorian state school student is, or continues to be, disadvantaged through the lack of access to a specialist-led education in music.

Thank you for your attention to our submission.

Yours sincerely



Rachel Snedden
BMus
Peripatetic Instrumental Music Tutor



Fiona Walters
BEd (Mus, Eng); MEd (LLAE)
Editor & Peripatetic Instrumental Music Tutor

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

14 February 2013

The current extent of music education is far too limited in far too many Victorian schools at present. Every school should offer students access to a professionally trained music specialist teacher every week throughout their school lives – but this is not the case. This submission, which is based on the experience, professional practice in state primary schools and professional development activities of Rachel Snedden and Fiona Walters, will focus on **the benefits to students and the broader society of *authentic* music education in schools.**

Making music is an ancient human pursuit. Entrainment (the phenomenon in which humans synchronise together to a rhythm, such as in music, dance or foot tapping) suggests that music is integral to the human state, and music's direct access to the emotions gives it great power to enrich human lives.

The ancient roots of music making in human society mean that participation in music – at any level of skill – offers participants deep intrinsic rewards. However, in contemporary society where excellent music recordings abound, many Australians now leave all music making to 'the experts' and are the poorer for it because they deny themselves the benefits that making music brings to individuals and to society. This situation is due to many factors, but prominent among them is the **false perception** that 'some people are musical and some aren't musical'. This is not true. While some people have more obvious **talent** for making music than others, **every** human has the **capacity** to participate meaningfully in music making. What is required for **active participation in music** is a quality education under the guidance of a **specialist music teacher**. It ought to be the role of every Victorian primary school to establish the fact that every human being is, by birthright, a musician.

The **benefits** to students and the broader society of *authentic* music education in schools are, like the **potential, unlimited.**

Authentic participation in music – such as that which is made possible through the provision of a quality music education – fosters benefits such as:

- the fulfilment of Musical Intelligence, a unique human potentiality
- creativity and re-creativity
- non-verbal self-expression
- personal, emotional, intellectual and physical wellbeing
- the development of emotional intelligence
- non-verbal communication
- self-directed and individualised learning
- personal management and successful habits of learning
- lifelong learning
- holistic education
- self-confidence
- student empowerment
- increased connectivity between the hemispheres of the brain
- enhanced cognitive function
- community involvement
- students' participation in multi-age activities
- cross-age mentoring and peer support
- student leadership opportunities

While it may not be possible to *quantify* benefits such as those examples listed above, it is worthwhile to discuss their qualities and intrinsic value.

Benefits of music education: qualities and values

Why do humans find music so rewarding? In *The singing Neanderthals: the origins of music, language, mind and body*, Steven Mithen (2005) argues that – far from being mere entertainment, or some random offshoot of language – music fulfils an evolutionary function in human society. Perhaps music's foot-tapping, heartstring-tugging power to change mood, create a sense of unity or engender social harmony explains why making music continues to be so deeply satisfying. Music 'speaks' directly to our emotions, bypassing words, and thus helping us to comprehend and express the inexpressible.

In contemporary Australian society, with its 'crowded curriculum', music educators require a robust philosophy to argue why and how music should be learned. Music is unique in its power to enhance students' cognitive, physical, emotional and social development. Learning to play and read even simple music is a truly sophisticated pursuit, requiring a combination of intellect, physical coordination and emotion. This interplay activates parts of the cerebellum and the four lobes of the brain, developing cognitive function. In addition to physical and emotional skills, therefore, students learning to play musical instruments develop enhanced thinking skills, which also enrich their lives and allow them to be more effective learners in domains other than music. In terms of Howard Gardner's (2006) Multiple Intelligences theory, not only does instrumental

playing help develop musical intelligence – recognised as a distinct form of knowing, with its own language, and therefore worthy of education in its own right – but it also requires the interaction of numerous other intelligences as well: logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Music education should be accessible to all because all can benefit from it. In addition to gaining musical skills, students also acquire physical and behavioural skills that are transferrable to life lessons and learning in general. The life skills that students learn include ‘habits of mind’, self-discipline, personal management, teamwork, leadership and responsibility, which will help them achieve all their goals in life, whatever they may be and in whatever sphere. Due to music’s facility for educating the whole person, and particularly for exercising emotional and social competencies, music can lessen problems of social isolation and help build community. Quality music education programs foster community involvement because making music promotes social cohesiveness, peer support and social skills; music makers learn that the ensemble is greater than the sum of its parts.

Humans turn to music when words fail. As a non-verbal form of self-expression, music making is particularly important for boys, who can find it more difficult than most girls to express their feelings or concerns. When two 10-year-old boys were asked to write a brief statement to accompany a music competition entry, they went away and thought about their music ensemble conductor’s suggestion that they perhaps describe the feeling they get when all playing together at a performance. Their written response was: ‘It’s an indescribable feeling!’ This highlights how hard it can be to articulate the value of music. We know that through music therapy, the movement of severely autistic children can be regulated because of the power of beat and rhythm to influence humans. More subtly, self-expression through music can also help humans regulate their responses to emotional stress.

Performances galvanise musical learning and help develop concentration and confidence. Furthermore, performance opportunities – which should be integral to any authentic music program – offer students the thrill of presenting the fruits of their labours to an appreciative audience, reinforcing the message that valuable rewards flow from making preparatory efforts in rehearsals – and the greater the effort, the greater the sense of achievement. Performances also provide the opportunity for listening and learning as well as honing playing skills and building self-confidence. Where a performance involves a large proportion of a school community, the positive efforts of so many, engaged in a common goal, ensure that performances also boost community spirit.

Why learn music in schools? Music must be perceived as being as valid as other subjects; this unspoken message creates the best mindset in students for learning because it validates the pursuit of musical outcomes. This is especially important for boys, as – often in Australian society – music making is not regarded as being as socially acceptable an activity for boys as it is for girls. Student participation rates in co-curricular musical activities, such as

instrumental ensembles, show that many more girls participate in music at state primary schools than do boys. In addition, because music is a *language*, and the brain's language-learning landscape is most fertile in infancy, music is best learned at as young an age as possible.

To gain the potential benefits of music education, every school must provide students with frequent and sustained access to a **specialist music teacher**. Our society holds specialists in high regard with good reason: society would not allow a general medical practitioner to suddenly become a brain surgeon, without intensive specialist training over a period of years. It is unfair to expect professional classroom teachers, even with all their skills and training, to teach a **specialist** subject like music. Could a professionally trained teacher *without* specialist knowledge of a language other than English, schooled for a total of only a few hours over the course of one semester in the imaginary subject 'Classroom LOTE' adequately teach that language to students? No. Such a teacher, who cannot speak the language, would lack expertise in crucial areas: in the *practice* of the subject, in the art of engendering an appreciation of its beauties, its grammar and so on, and in the understanding of its pedagogy. Such a teacher would be ill equipped to deal with difficult or unexpected questions or to extend students fully. Such a teacher would lose the respect of students. So, too, teachers *without* specialist knowledge of music, trained in 'Classroom Music' for a total of only a few hours cannot adequately provide quality music education. Such teachers may be gifted amateurs, who can successfully make classroom music sessions fun and entertaining for students but – not being **music specialists** – they lack the expertise to provide authentic music education programs.

To provide a truly holistic, empowering education for our children, society needs to invest in quality music education. The looked-for benefits of music education can only be achieved through continuous, sequential and developmental programs provided by professional specialist music educators. The worth to individuals and to society of rich, professionally devised music education programs is immeasurable because the knowledge, skills and behaviours they promote have unlimited potential to enrich human lives in unique and complex ways.

References

- Gardner, Howard. 2006. *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice*. New York: Basic Books.
- McPherson, Gary. 2011. 'Evidence-based approaches to teaching music to children and adolescents'. Presented as the Victorian Music Teachers' Association Clifford Lecture. Melbourne: 7 August.
- Mithen, Steven. 2005. *The singing Neanderthals: the origins of music, language, mind and body*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Snedden, Rachel and Fiona Walters. 2011. 'Proposal: Brunswick North West Primary School Recorder Program'. Submitted to Brunswick North West Primary School: November.