

Submission to the Victorian State Enquiry on Music Education

Nick Beach

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Biography

Nick Beach worked for 10 years as a peripatetic (itinerant) violin teacher working for UK Music Services before moving into Music Service management. He was Head of Education for Berkshire Young Musicians Trust and in that role led early innovations in whole class instrumental teaching. In 2012 he became Deputy Director of Music and Performing Arts for Trinity College London. He led the development of the UK government funded Key Stage 2 Music Professional Development Programme which provided professional development to three thousand UK music teachers, supporting them to deliver whole class music programmes. Between 2008 and 2010 Nick was engaged as a consultant by the South Australian government to support the development and roll out of their whole class instrumental music programmes. Nick is now Academic Director at Trinity College London with responsibility for all Trinity's subject areas.

Disclaimer

This document is submitted in a personal capacity. The views and opinions therein are personal to me and are not necessarily the views or opinions of Trinity College London.

Introduction

As my area of specialism is primarily music in the primary years I will focus on that in this submission, though many of the points raised are relevant throughout the school system.

The key points of this paper are as follows:

- The success of the music curriculum schools will be dependent on effective modes of delivery and on the skill level of teachers.
- In general, many primary classroom teachers lack confidence in music teaching but can develop this confidence through professional development and by working alongside practitioners with specialist musical skills.
- In many countries there is a separation between classroom music and instrumental music teaching – two separate music curricula.
- Aligning, and combining, these creates the opportunity to offer a rich musical experience to many more (and eventually all) children.
- There is a considerable specialist resource available in instrumental music services, instrumental teaching providers, performing groups, community musicians, etc., but in most cases these services are reaching a very small proportion of the population.
- The UK Whole Class Instrumental/Vocal Teaching (WCIVT) programme offers a tried and tested model which has been found in research to be "high impact" when measured against international standards.
- Consideration should be given to establishing trial programmes to test this approach in

Australian primary schools.

The Australian National Review of School Music Education

As far back as 2005 the Australian National Review of School Music Education highlighted a number of priority areas for development in the music education offered to children and young people in Australian schools:

- Improve the equity of access, participation and engagement in school music for all students
- Improve teacher pre-service and in-service education
- Improve curriculum support services (advisory, instrumental music, vocal music and music technology)
- Support productive partnerships and networking with music organisations, musicians, the music industry and the Australian community
- Improve music education in schools through supportive principals and school leadership, adequately educated specialist teachers, increased time in the timetable, adequate facilities and equipment.

These aims remain good today but there are barriers:

- Music is commonly viewed by many generalist classroom primary teachers as the subject that they feel least confident to teach
- The provision of music specialist teachers in primary schools is often uneven
- Many areas of music provision (commonly instrumental and vocal programmes) don't see their role as the delivery of national curriculum music.

As with the UK, many Australian states have well established state funded music services whose prime aim is to deliver instrumental music lessons. However, as with such organisations in the UK (at least until recent years) there are issues with these organisations:

- They reach very limited numbers of children – in most cases less than 10% of the school population
- This raises the question of what benefit is offered by such services to the other 90% of children
- There is little or no evidence that pre-testing children for "suitability" to play a musical instrument or sing has any validity, but is more likely to reinforce the take-up of instruments from the children of aspirational parents from high socio-economic backgrounds
- There are commonly two parallel music education systems, that delivered in primary schools by generalist and sometimes specialist teachers, and that delivered in instrumental/vocal music lessons by teachers from Instrumental Music Services or other providers. This is a poor use of resources.

Music entitlement in the UK

The UK music education sector has grappled with very similar issues to those outlined above:

- Instrumental/Vocal Music Services in the UK, until recently, engaged a similar percentage of the school population in instrumental learning to those in Australia
- Whole Class Instrumental and Vocal Teaching (WCIVT) - also known in the UK as Wider Opportunities - is a programme driven by Instrumental Music Services themselves and supported by government funding
- Through WCIVT children are entitled to a year of tuition on an instrument, delivered in whole class groups and taught in collaboration between the instrumental/vocal specialist and the classroom teacher.
- WCIVT programmes deliver the National Curriculum and focus on performing, composing listening and responding.
- Following the year of entitlement children are able to make an informed choice about continuing with some sort of music making and over 50% of them currently do so.

What has been learned in the UK Whole Class Instrumental and Vocal Teaching model?

- In 2010 the UK Federation of Music Services published an impact research report by Anne Bamford of the University of the Arts which found:
 - The WCIVT programme is of a high international standard
 - It has significant impact on children's confidence, self esteem, achievement, behaviour, positive attitude, focus and teamwork.
 - Teachers report that children make as much, if not better, musical and technical progress in WCIVT whole class groups as they do in small group or individual tuition.
 - Classroom teachers grow in confidence with music and are able to undertake work independently in their classes.

Key indicators for success in Whole Class Instrumental and Vocal Teaching

Access and Inclusion: every children has an experience which is appropriate to their needs

Creativity: children's creative development is fostered and encouraged

Integration: lessons integrate all that it is to be musical - generating, realising, responding

Collaboration: when instrumental/vocal specialists plan and teach alongside classroom generalist teachers the result is rich learning for both and a better experience for the pupils.

Professional development: which recognises the different needs of all teachers taking part

WCIVT and the National Curriculum

WCIVT supports the delivery of the National Curriculum in a number of important ways:

- Bringing together the various resources which support music education into one programme not only improves the music experience of the children but is efficient and cost effective. It justifies the investment in instrumental Music Services.
- For the year or more in which they participate in a WCIVT programme children are

receiving a rich and broad music education which will enable them to make appropriate choices about future engagement with music

- Forming meaningful and effective links between instrumental/vocal specialists and classroom generalists will raise the confidence of classroom teachers to support music more widely
- WCIVT can utilise and provide a focus for the skills available in the community, both from music practitioners and groups

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Music education in many countries continues to be hampered by an artificial division between “school music”, as delivered by the school curriculum, and instrumental music, as delivered by teachers of musical instruments. In some cases, notably in Australia and the UK, both of these musical activities are supported by government funding.
- There are strong arguments in the music education literature for the benefit of music education to all children. However this division into two curricula results in a general curriculum offered to all children and a specialist curriculum offered to the lucky few.
- If the “specialist curriculum” was reaching the “right” children (whoever they are) this might be a justifiable situation, but in reality do we know whether the recipients of instrumental tuition are those whose parents would have paid for private tuition had funded provision not been available?
- The establishment of whole class instrumental/vocal teaching in the UK aimed to address this area and, though not without its issues, has achieved a good deal of success. At the very least, music services now don’t see themselves as providers of individual instrumental tuition for limited numbers of children, but as a key part of the school music education system, with much closer working links with classroom teachers.
- I would recommend that this enquiry looks carefully at the experience in the UK (and in South Australia) as part of this review.

A further article, yet to be published, is included as part of this submission.



Wider Opportunities

Nick Beach

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It's around ten years since the first Wider Opportunities programmes, and rather longer since some of us started experimenting with whole class instrumental teaching approaches. Throughout that time I have been one of Wider Opportunities most consistent supporters, confident in the view that this is the most important development in music education in a generation. During that time I have been closely involved in the Trinity/OU KS2 Music CPD Programme and have, with Gary Spruce and Julie Evans, been an editor of Making Music in the Primary School, the publication which tries to get to the heart of what makes these first access programmes tick. Now first access programmes have come of age: they are government policy and are included in the plans for music hubs, and everywhere you look there are children with instrument cases. So is this it? Have we achieved what we set out to achieve?

My personal view is the quality of music education offered under the Wider Opportunities flag is variable, including some of the best things we have ever seen in music education alongside some which are much more disappointing. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised about this. Music education, like probably any other area of education, is variable in its quality and we shouldn't be surprised that first access programmes are any different. I do wonder, however if there are some common threads between those programmes which offer real quality musical experiences and those which, to be frank, don't. In this article I shall explore some of those threads and propose that an often very narrow view of what music making is has resulted in equally narrow measures of success, with resulting limitations in the opportunities offered to children and young people.

Firstly it would be worth reminding ourselves why we embarked on this journey in the first place. Did we know what we were setting out to achieve and did we have a clear idea about what success looked like? In my own music service at the time our mantra was "but what about the other 90%?" – that being the 90% of children who didn't directly benefit from our services. But even behind this statement there are multiple motives – do we want to reach more children to give them a great musical experience, to justify our funding, or to increase take up for "proper" instrumental lessons? Another motivation was the poor state of music making in many primary schools and the potential role for music services and their instrumental teachers in improving that. There are probably many more justifications but it seems pretty clear that no, we didn't have any real clear and commonly understood answers to the question "Why Wider Opps?". Not surprising, then, that we have such a range of views on what success looks like and consequently such variability in quality.

My personal view - and it is just that - is that it wasn't just that there was a range of justifications for first access programmes, but that there were good and bad justifications. I think we are seeing the outcomes of those justifications now in good and poor practice in the classroom. And further I propose that it is possible to polarise those approaches into those which treat first access programmes as essentially a recruitment exercise, and those which treat them as offering children a broad range of musical experiences. The former is based on the assumption that musical progress can be represented as a pyramid, and the broader the base of that pyramid the better populated each subsequent level will be, and presumably the higher the peak will be. This is an attractive model, especially for a music service where offering a balance of quality opportunities at all levels relies on the ubiquitous question of how you ensure an appropriate supply of oboes for the youth orchestra - clearly "start more oboes" is your answer!

However it is a model based on failure. It assumes that at each subsequent level some will give up - they will discover that it is not for them, too hard, too much work, etc etc. Indeed the model is dependent on this drop out because what would happen if everyone continued at each stage - chaos (and too many oboes!). But are we really saying that it is acceptable that at the end of every successive year more and more children discover that music is not for them? I've never done the formal research, but I seem to talk to countless adults who played an instrument as a child and wish they hadn't stopped. And every survey we read tells us that huge percentages of the school population want to play a musical instrument. But the pyramid model insists that every year is harder than the last - a difficulty gradient which is presumably directly related to the shape of the pyramid - and that a proportion will fail at this year's hurdle.

So what of the other model, where first access programmes are not about recruitment but about offering a broad based range of musical experiences? The aim here is rather different and could perhaps be best characterised as being about being a musician now rather than learning some skills so that you can be a musician later on. And in this line of thinking being a musician is not just about instrumental skill, it is about performing, composing, improvising, singing, listening and a host of others. Skill development is there, of course, but it is not the main focus, just a means to an end. What is so attractive about this model is that it has multiple pathways for success, and hence multiple ways in which children can succeed. A skills based programme has a single success pathway - getting better at the skill. This is why drop-out rates are so high - the skills associated with learning a musical instrument are difficult to master and if that mastery is our only measure we are locked into the failure model. The multiple pathway model offers the chance to take side turnings, to explore composing, singing, other musical styles/genres/instruments. This is real musical exploration and will take us away from the traditional pyramid and will demand that we consider other models of musical progress. Youth Music have done some interesting work in this area which you can read at <http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/features/>

So if we continue to consider these two models – let’s call them skills path and multiple paths – what sort of musical experiences might we, as teachers, offer children. The skills path is a pretty well established one, based on an assumption that the development of musical skill is a more or less linear one, with progressively more difficult skills being learned in a sequence defined by the teacher. In a Wider Opportunities context this is represented by the learning of short easy pieces, perhaps with backing tracks, but critically with the learning and refining of the piece as the main musical aim. The end result might be a performance to school or parents – or there might even be a shared event where their learned tune is built into some larger structure. But the model is a didactic one where the teacher sets the path and instructs the children how to follow it to the best of their abilities. Often the teaching will be imaginative of course – music education has some excellent didacts – and the children will probably experience a good warm up session, possibly some singing and other activities – but the prime aim of these is development of instrumental skill.

The multiple paths classroom is a very different place. There will be pieces to learn of course but the lesson planning will probably tend towards a project based approach rather than a repertoire based one. Pieces will be treated as a stimulus, or starting point, for children’s creative development rather than merely things to be learned. There will probably be lots of opportunities for children to work in small groups where the outcomes are less determined by the teacher and more by the children themselves. We might also find opportunities for links with other parts of the curriculum as well as links with other places children might make or experience music. There will be performances of course, but these are likely to be multi-faceted affairs where children perform some of their own music, improvise, sing as well as playing their instrument. In this environment the teacher’s role is a different one – perhaps more a facilitator than an instructor. This is tough for many of us as instrumental teachers as it involves giving up some level of control to the children themselves. It involves moving away from a model where music education is “done to” children to one where it is at least “done with” them, or possibly even “done by” them.

I talked earlier on about measures of success and I return to that topic to end. In an attempt to measure the success of Wider Opportunities the previous government rather unwisely attached a target that 50% of children taking part in a Wider Opportunities programme will continue beyond the first year. Although I’m sure it was not intended to do so this tended to encourage us to think about Wider Opportunities as a recruitment process, how many could we get to continue past the first year. Measured in this way 50% is a disastrously low figure – if we are saying that the purpose of Wider Opportunities is to ensure that 50% of children want nothing to do with music making after their first year of experience of it I think we would be better not providing music education at all. Let children get on with making music on their own (they are rather good at doing that) and stop putting them off!

Perhaps our measures of success should be our success in supporting the huge array of different ways in which children will continue to enjoy music – as performers, composers and listeners. Maybe they won't follow a progressive linear model of learning. Maybe they will want to pick it up from time to time. Perhaps they will want to try a range of different instruments/styles/genres. Maybe they will write their own songs – or work out their own versions of the songs they like. Perhaps they won't want to play more and more difficult pieces but are happy at the same level. Or maybe they will be driven to play or sing that song which is much too hard for them but with the sort of obsessive determination that children can show they are going to get there. Or perhaps they will listen, or dance, or act, or paint, or be moved, or be still, or be excited, or be calmed, with friends, on their own, or just know that music is one of the things that makes our world work.

So in conclusion I think that, as a music education community, we need to recognise that the acceptance of Wider Opportunities programmes is the start of our small revolution in music education, not the end. Perhaps our next steps might be to:

- Continue to consider new models of musical development which recognise that there are many ways of being a musician.
- Continue to consider and support new delivery models that provide for these multifaceted young musicians
- Continue to consider how best to hand some of the control of music education back to children and young people.

