

Submission by Meadows Primary School-5524

Re: Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools

Environmental Context

Meadows Primary School is situated in the Northern Metropolitan Region. The school is the result of the merger between Campmeadows and Meadowbank Primary Schools, this occurred in 2008 as part of the Broadmeadows Regeneration Project. Current enrolment is approximately 295 students, comprising (as at 2009) 48% English, 29% Arabic, 3% Samoan and 3% Turkish students and the remainder of the students comprise over 20 different types of cultures. The Student Family Occupation density of the population is in the order of 0.86, translating to just under 90% of the parent population are unemployed.

Music Curriculum

The school historically, provided Art and Physical Education as specialist classes and prior to 1994 also provided Music. However, from 1994 until 2003 Meadowbank did not offer a music program, nor were the teachers expected to provide music education within their teaching practice. In 2005 and 2006 through the Artists in School's Grant musicians came into the school for one term each year and taught each grade a song in preparation for the school concert. I registered with The Song Room program in 2007 and 2008. They provided an artist in residence for one term each year, again working with each class culminating in a whole school concert. In 2008 and 2009 the Smith Family funded Meadowbank's involvement in the Musica Viva program. In this instance, teaching resources were provided to the school around the visiting cultural group's performance. The teachers used the resources to prepare the students for the one site visit made by the musicians. This would occur in a whole-school participatory capacity.

So, in summary, classroom teachers were supported by artists or educational resources for one term each year-this was the extent of the music program.

Pizzicato Effect- Why our school?

In 2008 under the direction of then Victorian Premier John Brumby, the Education Outreach Manager for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) was looking for a school to trial an instrumental program based loosely around the philosophy of the El Sistema instrumental music program in Venezuela. An informal conversation between a Meadowbank school teacher and MSO's then Outreach Manager centred around the lack of a specialist music program and any music opportunities for students at Meadowbank, the low socio economic background of the families (close to 93% of the families were unemployed) and the fact that not one student was receiving private music tuition in the entire school. These were the contributing

factors as to how these two organisations came together and subsequently, the implementation of the Pilot Program known as Pizzicato Effect.

Pizzicato Effect- The Program

2008-2009

- Compulsory intake year would be Grade 1 students, approximately 40 students were given an instrument to take home.
- Every Monday the students would bring the instruments back to school to be used in the lessons.
- Two musicians from the MSO would conduct 30 minute group lessons on the violin, viola and the cello, covering all the students over a three hour period.
- Group sizes were approximately 8-9 students.
- 2009- these students, now in Grade 2, were given the choice as to continue or not; approximately 90% continued.
- Students performed for parents at the end of year concert.
- Parents offered tickets once per year and free bus to attend an MSO concert. Only one parent showed interest.

Decision: Grade 2 classes would become the new compulsory intake year as it became evident that due to our students lack of musical background the instrumental teachers were spending far too long teaching basic rhythm and beat and unable to begin teaching actual instrumental classes for months.

2010-2011

- Compulsory participation of Grade 2 students.
- One conductor employed to take musicianship classes for half an hour involving only students participating in Pizzicato.
- At this point original group of 2008 are now in grade 4 and at least half are still involved in the program.
- Some students have performed at the Melbourne Town Hall with the MSO. Most parents attended to watch their children perform.
- Practice Clubs were established for students to have an opportunity to practice during their lunch break.
- Extra teachers employed to ensure group sizes are smaller.

2012-2013

- Compulsory intake is now Grade 3 students
- At this stage there are approximately 95 students participating. 51 are the new compulsory intake and 44 are from the previous cohorts that are still involved in the program.
- The school received \$50,000.00 from the NAB Schools First Impact Award and this allowed us to employ a Kodaly teacher to teach fundamental skills of singing, rhythm, pitch etc. in the Prep, Grade 1 and Grade 2 classes. This money also allowed us to use one of our teachers in a .5 music specialist role in the Grade 3, 4, 5 and 6 classes.
- There are now 7 teachers from the MSO taking instrumental classes
- Students in the ensemble-a higher performing group, participate in:
 - 30 minutes instrumental classes
 - 30 minutes musicianship classes (lunchtime)
 - 45 minutes after school ensemble rehearsal
 - 30 minutes practice club (lunchtime)

Teacher Training

My involvement in The Arts teacher network within the Broadmeadows cluster has highlighted some issues voiced by the specialist teachers. They are concerned that teachers in smaller schools where funding is limited, are taken out of generalist teaching roles and placed into the specialist music teacher role without any formal training. This is exposing students to low quality music education. Larger schools however are able to advertise the role of music specialist and are in a position to select the highest trained and experienced specialist educator in the visual or performing arts domain.

In our context the music specialist, teaching the grade 3, 4, 5 and 6 classes is a generalist teacher. The school which is currently operating in deficit is unable to afford the professional development required to increase her understanding and skills in the area of Kodaly training.

General Benefits of Music Education

The University of Melbourne is conducting a longitudinal study on the effects of music education on our students. *Creating musical futures in Australian schools and communities: Refining theory and planning for practice through empirical investigation is funded by ARC Discovery Grant: DP1093041.* The Principal Investigator is Professor Gary McPherson, Ormond Chair and Director, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, The University of Melbourne. I am assisting his researcher Dr Margaret Osborne in the administration of the cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing tests and conducting interviews with the students and their parents. I am able to say that the benefits of this program are tangible and I am

confident when the research is completed (end of July 2013), the evidence will be significant and positive. Our students are developing in self-esteem. They have played for their parents in school concerts, some have played for Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall, students have been invited to Government House, our students have played for the Governor of Victoria and his wife, Mrs. Chernov. The students are proud, confident, happier, feel special and tell me they feel privileged. The students have been interviewed for the channel 10 program the Project and the ABC's 7:30 Report, they have been interviewed by local and mainstream journalists, with the music program featuring twice on page three of The Age. These media opportunities alone lay testament to the perceived value of high quality instrumental music programs in our schools.

Every one of these opportunities has impacted each child that has participated in the event. But more than that, their parents and siblings are reaping the benefits of such a high profile, high status program. Confidence in knowing that these Broadie families are being valued by what they formally believed was an elitist organisation, (the MSO) has made the parents smile, become outspoken on the joys of classical music and humbled by the opportunity that has come to their children. Openly acknowledging that under no circumstances were they ever able to provide their child with instrumental tuition. The parents have said that only when their child attended secondary school in the future; would they have had the opportunity to learn an instrument for free. Unfortunately however, upon looking into our feeder secondary schools I have noted that no school currently offers free tuition into these (violin, viola or cello) instruments. My role is to now liaise with these schools and try and develop a cohesive transition into their music programs for our ensemble students as they head into secondary school next year.

Testimonials

An interesting finding from the interviews that have been conducted as part of the (University of Melbourne) research project is that many of these children now see themselves as musicians in their future. When asked what job they would like to have upon leaving school, at least one third say that perhaps playing in an orchestra, or a band is a possibility.

When asked do they think learning to play an instrument helps with their learning in other subjects or helps them to be better in anything else? Most have been recorded saying, they think it helps with their concentration, able to focus better and somehow they learn their maths better.

When parents have asked if they are happy that their child participates in music tuition? They say that they would never have been able to afford this for their child. Some say that the whole family sits around in the lounge room watching as their child practices. One family said that to calm their intellectually handicapped child, the older brother plays his cello and soothes his sibling.

Funding

The submission by Bronwyn Lobb, who is the current Education Outreach Manager for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, will no doubt break down the funding that has supported this wonderful program in our school. But as you will note it has only benefited one school. Our goal is to try and access funding or support from other sources including the local council to ensure this type of program can reach students in the area who attend neighbouring schools. This is because all the schools in the area are unable to provide a music specialist, or at least free instrumental tuition for their students.

The social imperative

Currently over 25 countries have replicated the El Sistema music program which originated in Venezuela. This program has documented great success on the impact it has made upon the self-esteem and empowerment of families living in low socio economic communities. Given its wide success and implementation; it is difficult to believe that compulsory instrumental tuition in schools is not seen as a moral imperative.

Given all the documented research findings on how similar programs benefit the young brain, it is difficult to believe that quality music education has not been targeted as a priority. As Brian Caldwell and other researchers demonstrate in their books (and we will also show this when our research is completed), after conducting copious amounts of research into the benefits of music programs, they note that huge amounts of government funding go into providing resources to improve the literacy and numeracy data, but the government bodies overlook the Arts programs as adding legitimate value to this end.

Thank you for allowing Meadows Primary School to provide input into your inquiry.

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