

15 February 2013

Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Sir/Madam

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

I wish to make a brief personal submission to this inquiry because I believe that music education is of critical importance both in Victoria and throughout the world. I am a music graduate and someone for whom music has enriched my whole life but I have begun to realise that many Victorian children may not currently have the opportunity to acquire even basic musical skills.

I agree with research put forward by many in the industry including the Australian Music Association www.australianmusic.asn.au which claims that:

- Playing music improves memory, concentration, reasoning and communication skills
- Music training improves verbal memory and special abilities
- Students who participate in music and the performing arts have fewer social problems

However beyond such practical and important reasons to encourage music training for children I believe it should be remembered that engaging with music is a critical marker of our humanity. It is only with the rapid rise of recorded music in the 20th century that a great deal of our society has been divorced from everyday practical music making. This has the potential to result in a huge human and creative loss within Western and increasingly secular societies such as Australia.

The ability to read music and produce creative sounds should be considered a basic and fundamental human right, just as critical as literacy and numeracy. Musical skills allow individual humans an opportunity to participate in their own history and community. Any person who has learnt how to read notated music and create their own sounds, by whatever means, has the potential ability to tap into the cultural history of the last 500 years or more. Without those critical skills, a large part of the history of human existence is not available to them. Access to knowledge and information which is so important in the 21st century must also include access to practical musical skills for all individuals, and particularly for children, for us to have a functioning and culturally rich society.

Having recently been involved with the primary education of a number of children, I have become aware that music education is not necessarily universally available. If a teacher with good musical skills leaves a school, the replacement teacher will not necessarily be required to have the same skills and music programs can lapse, with children in following years not having access to equivalent training. Access to music education can be ad hoc

and inconsistent and the accompaniment for many musical activities is now provided by sound recordings instead of a music teacher. There does not seem to be a basic level of mandatory musical training for all children as a requirement of the curriculum or the same musical opportunities available for all individuals.

When trying to support young children to play and extend their musical skills at home I have also noticed their lack of access to a canon of even basic songs and tunes. When trying to help a child move through a musical tutor expecting them to be able to sing or even recognise basic song tunes or rhymes, I have found they often don't even have these basic abilities on which to try and build their capacity with an instrument. Possibly because our community is increasingly secular and multicultural, they often do not know old hymns or folk songs the tunes for which were once pervasive. More alarmingly they do not seem to have replaced this with a knowledge or ability to sing popular contemporary songs. I have found this very discouraging and it has made me sad to think that these children may potentially have a less rich inner life as adults if they cannot share so many important human musical experiences.

I believe it is critical that Victoria provide high quality basic music education to ALL our children. Music literacy should be considered a key element in the education of all children just as much as language or science literacy. All children should have the opportunity to access their own musical ability and develop and nurture it throughout their lives. As a child I remember my whole, admittedly small, school coming together for just a short time every morning to do part singing of songs from all cultures and learn basic musical concepts. Not all of us chose to take our music further but without a doubt, all benefited from having the basic skills to access so much of human history.

I hope this inquiry will recognise the huge value that can be provided to individuals and the broader community by universally available music education. Music education should be considered a critical part of every child's education, and not just an add-on for those whose parents can afford it and recognise its value. The ability to read music, play an instrument, sing and dance are part of a complete and fulfilling human life. These are skills that can easily be transmitted to each child with a relatively small amount of time and effort and can open their hearts and minds to a world of culture and creativity. I believe significant Victorian government funding should be committed to:

- High quality music education training for all teachers
- The universal incorporation of music across the curriculum
- Support for group music making activities in all schools
- The development of pathways of musical creativity beyond schools and into wider community music making for both children and adults

The government should consider appointing a high-profile music education ambassador and ensuring ongoing funding for the development and maintenance of community music programs for all children to ensure a strong and resilient Victorian community into the future.

Many thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

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