

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

**ATT. Ms Kerryn Riseley.
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee.**

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Submission from Mrs Beverley M. McAlister OAM.
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To the Chair E.T.C.
David Southwick MP

BACKGROUND TO MY INTEREST IN MUSIC EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY MUSIC.

In 1976 my husband who was a secondary teacher, and later a high school principal, was awarded an international teaching exchange fellowship which involved our whole family including four children moving to Eureka, Montana USA for an amazing year of snow, bears, a real sheriff, guns and music.

All four children attended school for a year and became immersed in music education. Music education started in prep and all primary classes everyday in the classroom. Instrumental music learning started in grade four as by then the children could read music. Music staff were shared with local feeder schools in outlying districts which ensured continuity of learning.

Bands, choirs and a variety of ensembles started at grade three with a marching band from grade five.

Music education continued through junior high, and senior high with performances enhancing community events across this isolated wild west community in the Rocky Mountains.

Competition between school districts and intervarsity was encouraged, as was performance at community events.

1976 was the USA Bicentennial year and music was everywhere.

We had never seen anything like this and enjoyed it all.

In 1977 we returned home to Victoria complete with a clarinet and a new awareness of the potential for music education and community music to children and the community.

It soon became evident that the current provision of music education in our schools and community would not meet our needs for our own children so with the help of lots of people we launched the Dandenong Ranges Music Council in 1979.

The Hon Bill Borthwick was the member for Monbulk and was a great supporter of the development of community music and music education.

Over 33 years DRMC has worked in partnership with schools and communities to deliver a diverse range of music education from early childhood to HSC/VCE, projects with famous people like Don Burrows to introduce jazz to 180 students, Richard Gill to introduce opera to twelve primary schools and their communities and composer Calvin Bowman to introduce children to composition and performance of new Australian work.

Music in the form of song writing has been used in bushfire recovery after the 1997 Ferny Creek Fires and Black Saturday.

Yehudi Menuhin says.

" A COMMUNITY'S MUSIC IS ONLY AS GOOD AS ITS MUSIC EDUCATION."

I see this as relevant to the cultural development of Australia .

As a nation we must have the capacity and ability to contribute musically and to identify and belong in a musical way eg. when we sing Waltzing Matilda or even " Good old calling wood forever "

Music education paves the way for careers in the music industry, entertainment, music technology, education, music therapy, recording studios, computer games, film score composition and so on.

Music uses both sides and the brain and we know that this assists with problem solving and learning. Melbourne University have a dedicated Centre for Music. The Mind and Wellbeing which is currently undertaking research.

CURRENT AND EXTENT OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS.

It would be fair to say that over the 33 years I have observed that the provision of music education in schools, is still delivered in an adhoc manner, with the exception of secondary music specialist schools which are hopefully well resourced.

With the best will in the world most schools struggle to find generalist classroom teachers at primary school confident and capable of delivering music in the classroom .

As well, specialist trained music teachers are rare and training delivered by tertiary institutions has changed dramatically.

The best trained music teachers came out of the Melbourne College of Advanced education in the 1980s and 90s. The B.Ed course had both classroom and instrumental music methods which made teachers very versatile and useful to schools as well as able to conduct ensembles, choirs and direct musical theatre productions.

There was also a primary stream for those wishing to train as primary music specialists.

I am unable to comment on current music teacher training but it must be reviewed.

I am aware that Monbulk Primary School as part of its music specialist grant this year is developing classroom music resources for generalist teachers. Professional development has commenced for classroom teachers at every level.

This is a brave and innovative concept which will assist classroom teachers with no music teaching skills to engage children across the curriculum in musical games, songs and participation through singing. Research on the impact on learning is integrated into this program.

Principal Ray Yates will give details to the inquiry in his submission I am sure.

It is critical that the Education and Training Committee knows that music education has two components.

Classroom Music and Instrumental Music .

Classroom music at high school varies greatly depending on the teacher. It can include composing, performing, creating, computer music, singing, music history, listening to music from many styles and music theory.

Instrumental music is the learning of a woodwind, brass, percussion instrument (rarely strings or voice) and the participation and performance in an ensemble such as a band, orchestra or choir. Students withdraw on a rotational basis from classes to learn their instrument and attend rehearsals at 7.30 am, lunch time or after school

Note. In the school our children attended in the USA instrumental music learning and ensemble was a time tabled class. This is not the case in Victoria

I am not able to comment on the V.E.T. Music course.

I do observe musical theatre productions of high standard presented in collaboration with teachers from other faculties mostly rehearsed after school and evenings.

Music productions at primary school level are sometimes the only music education experience that a child will have. Usually the whole school is involved with many after school hours rehearsals and parents involved in making costumes, designing programs selling tickets, supervising children and seeking sponsors. Sometimes this takes a whole term and then **no** music for the rest of the year.

I also observe music staff leading choirs and bands at many community events such as Anzac Day, Carols by Candle light. Community festivals, nursing homes and school fetes. It is important to remember the work involved in rehearsing repertoire, communicating with students, organising transport, moving percussion gear, music stands, sound equipment, teaching performance etiquette, maintaining discipline and safety of students. Performing in the community is very good for children and gives them a sense of belonging and identity as well as serving their own town or community organisation.

STATUS OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.

Unfortunately the status of music education depends on the knowledge and leadership of the principal of the value, benefits and impact on learning across the curriculum. Most principals recognise the promotional value of children performing but are unwilling or unable to support a comprehensive classroom and instrumental program. School principals and councils have to make choices between sport, visual arts, library or music staff for classroom music. Instrumental music staff are not supplied to primary schools. This service is usually on a fee for service from independent contractors and varies enormously in quality. At least some children who can afford to pay can participate.

NOTE.Choirs and singing are the most cost effective way to provide a quality musical experience.

See www.singup.org as a major funded initiative in the UK to get all schools singing.

Launched in 2008 by Secretary of State Ed Balls with \$800 Million Australian for every primary school in the UK to come alive with the sound of music.

NOTE.Richard Nichols from Melbourne has been working for sing up. Richard would be a great contact to pursue this amazing initiative first hand. Richard worked for DRMC as a choir director in residence as part of the artists in schools program

CURRENT FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS IN SCHOOLS.

I am not able to comment with current knowledge on this.

However I do see school fetes raising money to pay music staff and buy instruments !

WHAT FACTORS AFFECT THE QUALITY OF MUSIC EDUCATION?

Teacher training of generalist primary school teachers.

Teacher training of classroom music teachers at primary and secondary level.

Training of instrumental and voice teachers including musical direction of bands, orchestras, choirs, contemporary music ensembles, jazz, rock, blues and so on.

Classroom music and instrumental needs to be sequential .eg to complete VCE music a student needs to start the instrument at primary level.

Obvious factors such as sound proofed music teaching spaces, rehearsal and performance spaces, resources such as music library, orchestral percussion, computer/digital music and sound equipment.

Independent schools have tiered band rooms, dedicated instrument storage and even a music secretary to support music staff particularly at music examination time.

Wesley. MLC, St Leonards College all offer strong music education as well as scholarships.

I am sad /happy to say that two grand daughters are both at Haillebury on music scholarships. A loss to the state system as anecdotally music students do well at school and as leaders across the curriculum.

Music parents support groups should be encouraged to assist with fundraising, sponsorship, transport of equipment to camps and concerts, front of house and back stage duties.

Music staff need all the help they can get and a well trained support group is very helpful.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR MUSIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.

It is my understanding that schools decide how they will dedicate staffing in classroom programs and what are the priorities across the school.

Instrumental staff are provided from the regions on a needs basis.

Some school councils employ instrumental music staff.

KEY BENEFITS AND ISSUES SURROUNDING MUSIC EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS.

www.musiccountusin.org.au/musicbenefits

There is plenty of research relating to the learning benefits across the curriculum.

RESEARCH LINKS.

musicplayforlife.org/index.php/research/music-schools

However the benefits to children include learning to work together in an ensemble or choir, taking direction from the conductor, learning to be a section leader, conforming to a performance uniform, pride and self esteem before peers and families, confidence and a sense of belonging and well being.

I have had the privilege of seeing children discover opera through DRMC community music program's with Richard Gill and the Victorian Opera, discovering jazz with Don Burrows, Bob Sedergreen, David Jones, and James Morrison.

Teaching staff receive professional development, validation for their work and fantastic encouragement. Funding for these school and community partnerships comes from endless soul destroying submissions to Arts Victoria and the Australia Council.

At least the work of Dandenong Ranges Music Council has delivered many children in our community musical experiences which they would not otherwise have.

We have seen great interest and ownership in new Australian music when children work with composers and perform the new work.

This helps to nourish and support the development of the national identity of the next generation and pride in being Australian.

IDENTIFIED GAPS IN EXISTING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

ARTS VICTORIA.

Funding to Arts Vic for the artists in schools program to have a dedicated music component would assist schools to engage professional musicians/educators to stimulate and enrich music programs.

Organisations working in partnerships with schools is a most efficient way to deliver musical experiences but obviously can NEVER take the place of a well resourced program

ANY MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM'S considered to be best practice.

Queensland delivers the best music education in Australia.

Sweden and Finland are also considered exemplary.

Thankyou for reading this submission.

I would be happy to attend a hearing or speak with members of the ETC.

Particularly addressing community music, music teacher training and school /community music partnerships.

Yours sincerely.

.OAM.

Email.
