



## **Response to the Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools**

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### **Preamble**

In 1956 Australian music educators met in Melbourne at a Seminar run under the auspices of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). A number of recommendations were made and four directly addressed music in schools. The seminar recommended to educational authorities that no primary or secondary school is complete without a properly designed music room and equipment – just as science in schools has special needs, so too does music. The seminar asserted that music should be a basic right in primary and secondary schools with two lessons per week being the norm. The UNESCO seminar also noted the inadequate supply of school music educators, particularly in primary schools and that both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should be enlisted to rectify this serious gap (Southcott, 2009). Since this seminal seminar, there have been repeated reports and reviews that have made recommendations about school music education. These have occurred at least once every decade. The most far-reaching review to date has been the *National Review of School Music Education (NRSME)* (2005) that achieved consensus amongst Australian music educators. The national summit was held in Melbourne and the review ultimately asserted that “Music education in Australian schools is at a critical point where prompt action is needed to right the inequalities in school music” and recommended that “Raising the status of music education will have a positive impact on the quality of music in schools” (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2005).

In 2005 the *NRSME* stressed the importance of providing “sequential, developmental music education programmes” and to “improve the standard of pre-service music education for all generalist classroom teachers” (p. xv). The *NRSME* addressed specialist music teacher education programmes with a desire to improve the quality and expand the provision of current offerings to ensure that “primary and secondary specialist music teachers can develop and maintain their knowledge, understandings, skills and values about teaching music” (p. xvii). As in 1956, the recent *NRSME* identified the importance of the voice in school music and the intention that every Australian student should participate in initial instrumental music programmes. The *NRSME* also addressed school music facilities, recommending that all schools have adequate facilities and provisions to support engagement in “continuous, sequential, developmental music education programmes” (p. xxi). These provisions should include music technology, hopefully as ‘state-of-the-art’ as the film strip was in 1956. The *NRSME* made further recommendations which did not echo quite

so exactly the recommendations of 1956. In 2005, the *Review* also recognized the crucial role of school leadership, the desire for all primary school students to have access to music specialist teachers, the importance of effective liaison with music organizations, and that effective programmes should demonstrate their quality through appropriate accountability measures. Other than the last few, the *NRSME* covers almost identical ground to the 1956 Seminar. It is disheartening to recognize how much time and effort has gone into what is, in some respects, little progress in the recognition and support of school music.

### **General benefits to students as a result of music education**

National and international research demonstrates that music education makes a unique contribution to the emotional, physical, social and cognitive growth of all students. Specifically music in schools contributes to both instrumental and aesthetic learning outcomes, transmission of cultural heritage and values, students' creativity, identity and capacity for self-expression and satisfaction (DEST, 2005). Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) analysed the results for 25,000 students on the USA Department of Education database and found that those students with high levels of participation in the arts outperform 'arts-poor' students in virtually every measure. Within this, sustained, sequential music engagement was demonstrated to have a high correlation with success in mathematics and reading. The *National Review of School Music Education (NRSME)* asserted the unique contribution of music education to the emotional, physical, social and cognitive growth of all students and confirmed that this contribution has been repeatedly confirmed by international and national research (DEST, 2005, p. v.). The chair of the *NRSME* Steering Committee, Margaret Seares, stated that all Australian students' aesthetic, cognitive, social and experiential learning skills benefit from the positive impact that an increased quality of music education creates (DEST, 2005). According to Bertram (2007), a study conducted by the Australian Music Association revealed that 90% of 1,945 Australians surveyed believe that "a good music education should be available to all schoolchildren, and 76% of non-music makers wished that they had learned a musical instrument" (p. 46). From a neurological perspective, music engagement enables the auditory cortex (the part of the human brain that interprets sound) to perform faster in terms of transmitting information from the senses to the brain (Gray, 2010; Collins, 2010; Eisner, 2002). In school music education, students' intelligence is cultivated musically through the learning of critical listening, expressive talking, creative composing, and analytical thinking. Students benefit from music education in the development of communication skills and emotional expression (Cosaitis, 2013). Music provides ways for children to make sense of their environment and is music engagement is crucial for the development of the brain (Mills, 1991, p. 107). From a sociological perspective, music education transmits cultural heritage from one generation to another and is essential in human behavioral development (DEST, 2005). There are so many reasons why music education should be valued and accommodated as any other core school subject, if not more so. Lehman (2002) believed that that any student who is permitted to leave school without receiving any music education would be just as much at a loss as if he or she had left school without being taught science or mathematics. But music should be taught as a subject in its own right, not just because it can enhance other learnings. Lehman (2002) argued that in order to cultivate one's innate musical potential early commencement and continuity of music education would optimize this development. The *NRSME* (DEST, 2005) maintained that in developing students' musical potential students are provided with an opportunity to succeed when performance in other disciplines may be lacking. Music is an essential part of human existence and should be understood in all its

complexity, diversity and forms by all of us, rather than just the gifted and the privileged (Mills, 1991). Music learning helps develop tolerance and empathy, and engenders “positive attitudes and keener insights towards others within the world community” (Madsen & Lawton, 2002, p. 150). The general benefits of music education for students are myriad.

### **Benefits to student academic performance as a result of music education**

There are numerous research studies that have demonstrated the wide-ranging benefits to student academic performance that result from learning music. Gray (2010) reports that recent research has suggested that music education should be placed in a more important position in school curricula in order to assist students with the development of their language and reading abilities. In addition to this point, Collins (2010) maintains that music education “could have a direct impact on a child’s ability to learn language by affecting the mind’s sensitivity to all sounds” (p. 1). Henley (2010) enhances this viewpoint, specifying that there is a link between music instrumental learning and the increase of children’s academic performance. Klinedinst (1991) concluded that beginning instrumental learners’ performances in mathematics, reading and scholastic ability strongly relate to the achievement in their instrumental learning. More than learning an instrument, class music can enhance mathematical ability (Zhan, 2008; Courey et al., 2012), assist with physiological development, and support teaching in all areas.

### **The extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools**

The *NRSME* (DEST, 2005) reported that in Victoria music was an elective subject only, and is often omitted or eliminated for non-academic reasons, such as budgetary limitations and classroom unavailability. In fact, there are only 23.4 per cent of government schools providing music education services. Furthermore, the provisions of the “Music Policy officer, Central advisory services or District/regional advisory services” have never been available (p. 48). Cosaitis (2013) found that many parents in Victoria have little choice but to send their children to high-cost private music lessons after realizing that the primary school where their child is studying has either inadequate music education standards, or does not offer music tuition at all. This understanding, again, was supported by the *NRSME* (DEST, 2005) which stated that, “While there are examples of excellent music education in schools, many Australian students miss out on effective music education because of the lack of equity of access; lack of quality of provision; and the poor status of music in many schools” (p. v). Clearly there are major concerns with the provision of effective music education in government schools in Australia.

### **Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools**

A successful music curriculum should during the general years of schooling be comprehensive, sequential, balanced, literacy-oriented, and enjoyment-based. Findings also recommend that the music teacher devise the curriculum for the purposes of serving students’ needs and levels of progression, incorporating the school’s culture, taking into consideration the nature of the local community. In terms of implementing teacher efficacy, skills in developing school music advocacy, maintaining quality classroom teaching, and organizing and managing choral and instrumental activities are essential for successful music programs. The research also indicates that an effective school music program requires a specialist who is a highly qualified,

experienced music teacher as well as an accomplished musician, and is, hence, a recognizably successful music specialist (Cosaitis, 2013). To achieve this it is necessary to address the often parlous state of school music education, particularly in primary schools. We have experienced some challenges when seeking state-supported primary schools where there is a well taught and resources school music program. When such schools are found they should be celebrated and emulated. Too often it appears that success was a matter of chance. A school with an enlightened principal who can prioritise music and who can recognise its myriad benefits are by no means common. There is no common position about whether music education will be included in the teaching program for all schools or whether the teacher will have adequate training and resources to deliver high quality music programs. The music education profession would welcome clear expectations concerning staffing, funding and resources that would assure the place of music in schools.

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