

## **Enquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools**

esubmission by Nicola Vague January 29th 2013

Music education is critical in feeding and nurturing creativity and innovation. In a rapidly changing global world, these skills in education, work and life are paramount. Leading businesses and corporations recognize and are increasingly seeking creative and innovative people and creating innovative and creative organisational cultures and practices—they know that this is the only path to remain viable and sustainable. Current ways of working are not sustainable. We have a responsibility to prepare our students to step up and take their place in work and community with this new skill set. To truly realise this there must be a massive step up in the commitment to music and other arts based education across all primary and secondary schools. Anything less is very short-sighted and sadly lacking any insight into how we are preparing today's students to be tomorrow's leaders.

Jean Houston, founder of the Human Potential Movement, inspiring visionary and global leader states in a recent email states: "Our education system is designed to create good workers who will slot into jobs and careers later in life – not to empower fiery, creative people who are forging the path ahead together". (visit [www.jeanhouston.org](http://www.jeanhouston.org).) It's the latter that we need for this changing world and music education for all students is vital.

In an education system that is progressively about measurement, assessment and a narrowing definition of 'success', (as opposed to nurturing the unique talents and gifts inherent in every child) music programs keep alive creative channels in students not to mention the positive impact socially and academically.

Sir Ken Robinson, a leading thinker and world renowned advocate for fundamentally changing the way that we educate believes that "creativity is as important in education as literacy and that we should treat it as the same status" [Sir Ken Robinson Ted Talk](#)

He further sites the challenge is that "we need education to take us into the future that we can't grasp". Again it is about creating educational opportunities to tap into the vast creative potential of every child, where a culture of being wrong is okay and even celebrate because as Robinson sites: "if you are not prepared to be wrong you will never come up with anything original". The world needs this vast un-tapped creativity and 'originality' to solve the global problems we have created and to create new sustainable ways of being.

Research undertaken by Teach for Australia indicates that there is currently a three year learning differential between students in the lowest and highest socio economic quartiles in Australia. ([www.teachforaustralia.org](http://www.teachforaustralia.org)). How can we bring more music education to lower socio economic communities and reap the learning and social benefits that come with such programs? Some of the benefits include: building student confidence and self – esteem, working as a team, sense of pride and achievement from performance and a sense of belonging to a group. The social and learning benefits provided by music education are well-researched. What action must be taken to act on what we already know? What is working well already with music education in this country and how can we attract passionate music specialists into schools in lower socio-economic

communities? There are many questions to be asked and carefully considered as a part of this enquiry.

As a mother of three daughters across two schools: Mont Albert Primary School and Canterbury Girls Secondary College (probably considered top quartile socio economic) I am really impressed by the level of passion and enthusiasm and the opportunities that our children have to be involved in the Creative and Performing Arts. We believe that these opportunities have had such a positive impact on our daughters all-round learning, confidence, sense of pride in performance, working as a team; and soulful expression which creates a sense of contentment and fulfilment. These experiences must be enhanced not diminished and be made available to every student in this country.

Here are some examples of what our daughters have access to:

At Mont Albert Primary School we have a talented string teacher who takes the school orchestra and ensemble and brings his passion for music to many students each week. This is not government funded and costs approximately \$100 per year per family. There are many other groups also offered and run mainly by itinerant music teachers. As is standard across the State (as I understand), to learn an instrument at primary school your parents need to pay for it. If your parents can't pay then you miss out. Is that what we want? Where is the equity in that? What needs to happen to get more funding for instrumental music lessons at primary school level?

Driven by a newly appointed music teacher, in 2012 the whole school (600 students) were involved in an outstanding musical production – the extra hours that so many teachers put in to create this learning experience for all of the children was extraordinary. The learning benefits were tremendous and the sense of pride and social and community connection that it created was exceptional.

The primary school groups are involved in various eisteddfods and undertake many performances in the communities at nursing homes, shopping centres etc. Music is a powerful avenue to build community connections and for students to learn about 'giving' and sharing their gifts and talents with their community.

We chose Canterbury Girls Secondary College (CGSC) because of its unique offering of music and performing arts and academic excellence. The music department is full of passionate and inspired music educators. At CGSC, music is a way of life. Each year there is a house Choral competition, which is a highlight on the annual calendar. Multiple performances are offered as it is a sell-out event. Girls from across years 7 – 12 come together in their houses and over a period of a few weeks pull together an amazing level of performance. The lead up period of doing planning and rehearsing and preparing props provided my year 7 daughter with such a great opportunity to build social networks with girls across all levels. That brought with it a new sense of belonging and confidence which is so important in any school community. The ongoing ripple effect of such an experience can't help but be noticed.....new friendships, new skills and lots of singing at home (=happy student). These are important skills for students to take into their own lives and communities.

Each week there are multiple instrumental and vocal groups offered for students to play in whether they have been learning for a term or many years. There is an extraordinary level of commitment of all music staff – well beyond their contracted hours. There is a shared belief amongst the music staff at Canterbury about the importance of music education and they consistently team together and go

the extra mile for the girls. The music groups are a great connector to the local community. One performance last year was by the Super Nova's at a local nursing home. Music sings to the soul and such delight was brought to the residents through the girls performance and the time they spent after the performance connecting and talking to the residents. For the girls it is an opportunity to 'give back' to community which is a core value of the school. Developmentally for teenagers – at a time in life where there is often a focus on "I" and not "we", such 'giving back' performance opportunities are inspiring "collective good"– values that are vital for the world we live in.

There are multiple lenses that must be looked through in this review of music education. Much of the research speaks for itself as far as the benefits of music education on student learning. Let's really listen to that. We also must hear the voice of global evolutionary thinkers and educators in this debate – creativity and innovation are paramount in this rapidly changing world. Any action that results in status quo, or sadly reduces the current funding to music education in this country would be naive, short sighted and ill-informed.

It's not to say that we've got it 100% right in music education, but there is a solid foundation that must not be eroded. The foundation that we have can be built upon so that every student in this country gets access to government funded music education.

It's time to raise the bar and be visionary about music education in the Country. What would it take for Australia to become a world leader in music education? Imagine the social benefits.

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