



VPA Response to the Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in School

A General View of Music in Primary Schools

Student involvement in school-based Music programs has declined significantly over the last twenty years. Previously classroom teachers taught regular timetabled music lessons to whole classes of students. The scope of these classroom programs covered percussion, beat, tone, etc. and was based around simple percussion or melodic instruments. Considerable attention was paid to singing, action songs, movement and dance. In many cases the music program taught by class teachers also focussed on drama. As part of teacher training, music was considered a core teaching skill which was assessed accordingly.

The increased focus on literacy, and then numeracy, has seen classroom music programs curtailed or abandoned in order to increase students' time on literacy and numeracy learning. The focus on narrow high-stakes testing in literacy and numeracy can be directly attributed to this diminution of music programs in schools.

Some schools have attempted to overcome the shortfall in student participation in regular music lessons by offering Music/ Performing Arts as a Specialist Program whereby students attend one class of Music per week throughout the year. This approach has had a low level of success for a number of reasons:

1. Lack of music teachers with a broad range of music, instrumental, dance, singing skills
2. Low level of relevance of the music program to the general class program
3. Budget limitations in schools where the priority has been the pursuit of smaller class sizes at the expense of specialist subject choice.

Parent expectations are that all government schools offer the broadest range of extra-curricular programs which includes music. Schools have attempted to partially meet this community requirement by engaging external

instrumental music and drama teachers to provide a program outside of the normal instruction time. These programs are accessed only by those families which can afford the extras or are more committed to the student's achievements in music. This approach precludes most students from participating in regular music education.

Evidence supporting music education in schools

The benefits of music education are well-known and clearly established:

1. Singing and action songs provide a solid pathway for young students to begin reading as they are able to build their understanding of the rhythm and patterns of English language.
2. An understanding of the patterns and rhythms in music are closely correlated with success in numeracy learning. Those students who are confident with music are often high achievers in numeracy.
3. Student self-confidence is enhanced by regular performance of skills learnt in music lessons.
4. The broader community values skill in music, especially singing and instrumental performance, enabling students skilled in these areas to excel and contribute to society.

The benefits of music education are strongly supported by academic research:-

- **The benefits to society and to individual students wanting to pursue music as a career** - According to MF Gardiner, A. Fox, F. Knowles & D. Jeffrey in "Learning improved by Arts Training", Secondary students who participate in the performing arts, including school bands, orchestras and ensembles are far less likely to be involved with drugs, crime or have behavioural problems.
- **General benefits to students as a result of music education** - According to F. Sandor "Music Education in Hungary" playing music increases memory, reasoning capacity and time management. Research at University of California – Irvine and the University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh demonstrate that learning and playing music builds or modifies neural pathways related to spatial reasoning tasks which are crucial for higher brain functions like complex maths, chess and science. The first studies showed that listening to a Mozart sonata temporarily improved a child's spatial abilities.
- **Benefits to student academic performance as a result of music education** - From the same university above – Studies compared

children who had computer lessons, children who had singing lessons, children who learned music using a keyboard and children who did nothing additional. The children who had the music classes scored 35% higher than the children who had computer classes or did nothing additional.

- **Evidence from the Pizzicato Effect Program in Broadmeadows**

Meadows Primary School in Broadmeadows is involved in the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's Pizzicato Effect Program and the University of Melbourne has included this in its 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. When this study is completed in July 2013 there will be significant and positive evidence for the benefits of music education.

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.

The students in the program at Meadows Primary School 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 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, none of Meadows feeder secondary schools currently offers free tuition into these (violin, viola or cello) instruments. The Meadows Music teacher is now liaising with these schools and try and develop a cohesive transition into their music programs for her ensemble students as they head into secondary school next year.

The MSO Pizzicato Effect Program is based on the El Sistema music program which originated in Venezuela and now replicated by over 25 countries. This program has documented the great 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 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.

Current provision of music education in Victoria.

- Currently it is difficult for schools to acquire trained, qualified music teachers.
 - Some issues regularly voiced by specialist music teachers, include concerns 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. They feel that this is detrimental as it is exposing students to low quality music education. Larger schools however are better positioned financially to advertise the role of music specialist and select the highest trained and experienced specialist educator in the visual or performing arts domain.

- The cost of instrumental teachers can be prohibitive and decisions about which instruments to teach can be difficult

- Schools have difficulty in providing space for music

- There is competition between specialist areas for time in the curriculum

- Specific examples of current music provision in Primary Schools:
 - Music education through specific funding for music education
At Mont Albert PS the school has made provision for 2 Music teachers for the 600 students as part of their varied curriculum. This would be similar throughout the Whitehorse, Boroondara, Stonnington regions

 - Music education provided through non-specific funding.
There is no evidence of this in the Whitehorse area but some disadvantaged schools do employ music aides.

 - Music education provided by parent contribution.
At Mont Albert PS some music groups are taken by private teachers. This is directly funded by the parents. Instrumental lessons both private and group are also funded by the parents.

 - The extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools.
Through the Whitehorse Network there are quite a few teachers who provide a sequential and balanced music program at their

schools, however there are also many Graduate teachers or class teachers put into a music role that are floundering. They attend Networks to gain knowledge and assistance. This would be similar in Regional and other Metropolitan areas of Victoria. Unless the leadership teams and /or parents at schools push for music, it is envisaged that this pattern would be statewide.

Future optimum provision of music education in Victorian schools.

- Music needs to be core curriculum for all teachers and students.
- It should be part of teacher training - both specialist music and music as part of the general classroom.
- Teacher training should show teachers how to integrate music into literacy and numeracy.
- High quality training and ongoing Professional Learning are required as Performing Arts in schools need to be of high standard.
- There need to be music transition programs between primary and secondary schools.
- Music camps are to be encouraged and exemplar programs need to be publicised
- Networks of music teachers need to be further developed.
- It is vital that training of music teachers is provided at universities and that schools don't rely solely on instrumental teachers. **To provide a balanced music program involving music playing, instrument playing, singing, drama, dance and movement** for all students is the penultimate goal. If our students can find enjoyment, confidence and a sense of belonging along the way this would be the ultimate goal!

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