



## **INQUIRY INTO THE EXTENT, BENEFITS AND POTENTIAL OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS.**

March 2013

***“A leading voice on rural education”***



## INTRODUCTION

The Country Education Project (CEP) welcomes the Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victoria School.

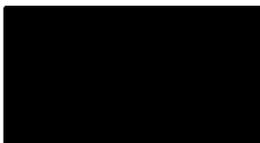
Since its inception in 1977, CEP has been involved in a range of ways to support the provision of music and performing arts within rural education communities. Specifically these have included:

- (i) The development of a shared specialist approach to the provision of music throughout a cluster of rural schools.
- (ii) The involvement of the wider community in the provision of music learning.
- (iii) In partnership with state-wide organisations (eg MSO, Regional Arts Victoria, Orchestra Victoria) supporting their activities and services are available within rural communities.
- (iv) In a partnership with key stakeholders, the development of an online music learning program involving a number of rural schools and communities.
- (v) Links developed with other countries who are providing music learning programs for rural learning communities. For example, Scotland.
- (vi) Consultation with organisations who offer music learning programs in other states.

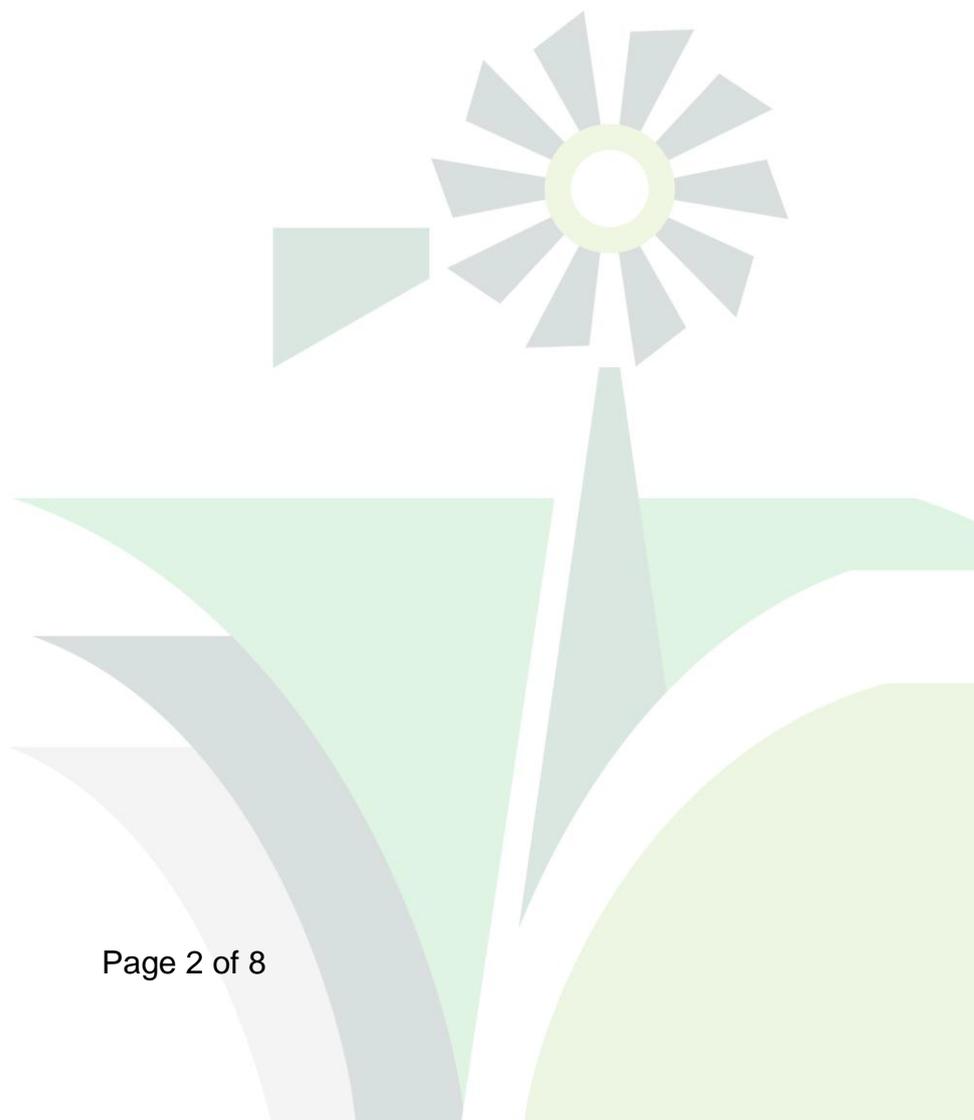
From these various activities, a number of challenges and opportunities have been identified in providing music learning for young people in rural communities.

This paper outlines in greater detail these challenges; outlines rural specific initiatives that have occurred; and details possible strategies for supporting rural music learning into the future.

CEP would also be prepared to present to the Committee to expand on the challenges and ideas outlined within this paper at an appropriate time.



Phil Brown  
Executive Officer



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## BACKGROUND

The Country Education Project (CEP) has been working in the area of Victorian rural education for over thirty-five years now. Initially established in 1977 as part of the Commonwealth Schools Commission Country Area Program, CEP has maintained a strong commitment to rural education and rural communities. It has operated as an intersystemic project since its inception.

With its strong commitment to building the capacity of these communities to provide high quality education provision, CEP promotes the clustering model as the central approach to achieving the desired outcomes for rural communities.

Participation, sharing, and collaboration remain the cornerstones of CEP philosophy and approach.

The Country Education Project covers all those rural communities who:

- have a population of less than 5,000
- are located at least 1.5 hours from Melbourne and at least 15 minutes from a regional population of 10,000 or more
- have limited, or no, access to public services
- has a "sense of community".

This represents more than 400 education communities throughout the state.

The Country Education Project has an elected committee of management, representative of rural education communities, key stakeholders, rural communities, education sectors and people with an interest in rural education.

In relation to the specific area of music learning provision, CEP has been involved in numerous discussions at a local, regional and state-wide level, as well as facilitated initiatives focused on music provision for young people in rural communities.

CEP believes that to ensure rural students have access to high quality music learning reflective of their needs and aspirations into the future, there are a number of areas that it would propose for consideration:

- The need to ensure that young people in rural communities have equal access to music learning opportunities, as do young people in regional and metropolitan communities.
- Support of education clusters involving learning organizations working collaboratively across sectors and education settings to provide music education.
- Support of stronger partnerships between rural education settings and their communities, to ensure that the music skills and knowledge within rural communities can be utilized within education settings.
- Stronger partnerships are formed between key performing arts organisations (eg Regional Arts Victoria) at a state and national level to ensure they support and engage with rural learning communities.
- Creative partnerships are supported between rural learning communities and state level music organisations (eg Victorian College of the Arts, Orchestra Victoria, and Victorian Symphony Orchestra) focusing on rural learning communities.
- The use of communication technology be fully explored. This would include building on the learning from initiatives that have occurred within Victoria and learnings from other education jurisdiction's in other states and overseas.

Within a 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environment where there is a strong focus on personalized learning along with the potential role digital learning can provide, CEP believes there are many opportunities to support a range of strategies and approaches to engage rural students in vibrant learning programs within rural communities. Within this submission, we detail the challenges highlighted by rural communities in relation to learning provision for talented students; outline the experiences gained through the initiatives supported by CEP; and propose a number of strategies and approaches we believe will enhance the opportunities for such learning communities into the future.

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## CHALLENGES

- *Crowded Curriculum:*

Over recent times, the provision of music within rural school communities has been an area that has decreased in focus amongst a number of rural communities. The focus on literacy and numeracy in recent times, while significantly important to the provision of learning, has meant that schools are prioritizing their time and commitment across the curriculum. This often means that learning areas such as music are often the first to be taken from the curriculum.

In addition, the change to the way in which resources are allocated to schools (through global budgets to individual schools) the cluster based approach to the provision of music within rural communities has almost ceased. One exception to this is in the South Gippsland area where a number of rural schools have combined resources to embrace a cluster approach to music provision.

- *Access to Support and Programs:*

In the past CEP has had a strong relationship with a number of state-wide organisations supporting them in providing music based programs that visited rural learning communities. For example Regional Arts Victoria, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Musica Viva, and Orchestra Victoria.

Sadly, in recent times, mainly due to economic reasons many of the initiatives do not exist, or have been centred on regional centres where rural learning communities are required to travel to.

- *Teacher Expertise:*

Staff recruitment and retention to rural learning communities is generally a real challenge for a number of rural communities.

When this area is focused on specialist curriculum areas such as science, technology, music, performing arts and languages, the recruitment of such staff is extremely difficult to achieve.

In addition, with the changing demographics of a number of rural communities, there is a growing concern amongst rural learning communities regarding the retention of quality teachers within these communities, especially within these specialist curriculum areas.

- *Self Managing Schools:*

In Victoria since 1992 the responsibility for running schools was been devolved to the local school level. Curriculum development, human and physical resources are managed by the school (within statewide guidelines). Rural and remote communities with two or three teachers have fewer personnel to share this load.

Given their many responsibilities, staffs in these settings struggle to find the time to provide enrichment opportunities for students.

Historically rural schools have worked collaboratively in local clusters to provide learning for their young people. This was strongly evident in curriculum areas of identified need – eg science, LOTE, technology and the arts. This collaboration resulted in initiatives such as Shared Specialists, sharing of staff across the cluster and the like.

With the introduction of the Self Managing School approach within Victoria, many of these arrangements have ceased to operate and individual schools are now focused on delivering learning within the context of their individual school.

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## CEP INITIATIVES

Over its thirty-five year existence, CEP has facilitated initiatives aimed at providing music education for students within rural communities. This involvement has often been related to the expressed need of rural learning communities who indicated a real need for student in this area.

The initiatives developed throughout this time have included:

- *Shared Specialist Approach:*

This was developed during the Commonwealth Governments School Commission era, when education resources were allocated to communities of learning to enhance learning opportunities for rural young people. Music was a key area identified by many rural communities for support in this area.

The shared specialist approach involved the employment of a skilled music teacher in supporting a number of education organizations across a rural community. Education organizations would share the resources available and provide support on the basis of:

- Cluster, or area resources would be provided to engage the shared specialist
- the schools would support the administration costs associated with the operation of the shared specialist – eg travel, office space, etc.
- the students involved would contribute through a school fee structure to the costs associated with their involvement within the programs – this varied depending on the focus of the cluster music program. Such resources would be used for accessing instruments, learning materials, and access to specialist tutors.

The South Gippsland Music Cluster is one of the very few such initiatives still operating today with the provision of a range of music learning programs, individual student music tuition, the use of specialist music teachers across the cluster of schools and the provision of a number of celebration events which highlight the positive outcomes of the music program.

- *Community Involvement:*

Rural communities have a number of local people with expertise within the music and performing arts area. Throughout its existence CEP has supported rural learning communities to work in partnership with their communities in accessing this resource with some very positive outcomes. This involvement was more evident within the 1980s and 1990s than it is today.

The introduction of the shared specialist approach in a number of rural communities was a key facilitator in the involvement of the broader community within the provision of music.

While this varies significantly from community to community, the

- *Access to Regional/State-wide Resources:*

Over the thirty five years CEP has been offering it has built strong partnerships with a number of key organization who provide specialist music programs and activities. Through these partnerships CEP established a number of strategies that have seen visiting musicians and groups tour rural communities across the state.

These partnerships were especially formed with organisations such as Musica Viva, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Victorian College of the Arts, Orchestra Victoria, SongRoom and Regional Arts Victoria. As mentioned earlier, in recent times (mainly due to economic situations) a number of these initiatives have been ceased or are now centred on regional centres where rural learning communities are expected to travel to access these programs.

In addition to these partnerships, CEP has also worked closely with a number of rural learning communities in successfully gaining resources to engage Visiting Artists as part of the Arts Victoria initiatives.

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- *PING Digital Learning Initiative:*

CEP was a key partner in the development of an exciting online music learning program which involved the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria, and a number of individual artists.

The project was developed to provide young people in rural learning communities with the opportunity to have access to high quality musicians through a combination of web based resources and materials along with regular online presentations with an identified musician. Musicians from the orchestras, along with identified individual musicians were involved in providing a range of programs for rural young people.

Over the years, the program expanded to include a range of other partners including the Songroom.

Sadly, due to resources not being maintained, and the changes in focus of some partner organisations this online program is not currently operating.

This project was based on a model that was developed within the rural areas of Scotland that utilized high quality music teachers, along with musicians, in the delivery of music through video conferencing and web based communication for young people within the Scottish villages. CEP has continued to maintain strong links with this initiative and learns a great deal from their experiences.

From the organisations involvement in these initiatives there are a number of learnings that can be gained for future possibilities:

- In relation to the provision of music within a rural context, the cluster approach provided a real opportunity for a comprehensive music learning program for young people within them, especially when this approach engaged a shared specialist focusing on music. This was further enhanced when the cluster utilized the skills and knowledge that existed within the community as a complimentary approach, or value add.
- The recent economic changes that are occurring within a number of state-wide organisations who provide touring programs and expertise has meant that access to such services for rural young people has decreased. Such young people are now expected to travel to regional centres, or in some cases, don't have access to these initiatives.
- The potential of communication technology provides a range of opportunities for rural young people to have access to music across a range of areas and specialties. However, the skills and knowledge of both rural learning settings, and the potential providers of the learning, needs to be improved to ensure the full potential to be realized.
- The number of young people within rural communities have decreasing access to music learning within their community.

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## POSSIBLE IDEAS FOR EXPLORATION:

The Country Education Project would like to present ideas/proposals for consideration by the government and believe they will enhance the provision of music learning programs for young people in rural communities.

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It would also be willing to meet with the committee to expand on these ideas/proposals further.

### 1. Cluster Approach:

As mentioned earlier in this submission, rural schools have historically worked together in cross-sectorial clusters within their communities (as well as state-wide) to enhance learning opportunities for their students. As a result of these cluster arrangements many innovative programs were developed especially in specialist curriculum areas where a need was identified. For example science, LOTE, the arts, VCE.

The added concept of a shared specialist to support the development and provision of learning within these clusters further supports that such an approach can enhance and improve music learning programs within rural learning communities. The example of the South Gippsland cluster is a great example of how this approach can provide rural young people with access to high quality music education and support.

The Towards Victoria as a Learning Community paper provides rural communities with the opportunity to establish a collaborative autonomy approach that is cross sectoral encompassing a whole of community approach.

*"... schools working together with common aims under a common banner they all believe in whilst retaining, at a local level, a sense of autonomy and uniqueness. Research suggests that sustainable school improvement comes from support and challenge from other schools and other partners. Accelerated progress for students comes through a mixture of support on a personal scale, great classroom teaching, a sense of success and aspiration within the alliance, and the ability to shape a 'personal' program that suits abilities and talents."*  
(Local Autonomy Trust – UK)

Such an approach is also supported in the paper:

*"Victorian schools will only be able to fully meet the future needs of students by collaborating and fostering networks of partners to build personal learning experiences for each student."*

CEP proposes the consideration of supporting locally determined cross-sectorial clusters of schools within rural Victoria from a policy perspective; and the allocation of resources to support music learning provision through a cluster approach, especially to allow them to work collaboratively in developing and delivering learning in identified curriculum areas and therefore develop the potential for "specialist" provision.

Specifically, CEP would encourage the state government consider supporting a cluster based approach to the provision of music learning through the allocation of resources to utilise a shared specialist approach, or form strong partnerships with their local community and state-wide stakeholders to provide the expertise required to deliver an effective music program.

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## 2. *Web-Based Learning Environment:*

Over recent times, there has been much discussion about the ways in which learning (for students, teachers and leaders) can be enhanced and improved within rural communities. A key element within these discussions has centred on the use of online learning approaches to achieve such improvement.

The State Government has invested significantly in the areas of communication technology, especially in areas such as personalized devices, ipads/notebooks, greater capacity of connectivity and, most recently, video conferencing.

In the recently released Towards Victoria as a Learning Community:

*"as the breadth and complexity of student demands increase, it will become even more important for students to access high-quality learning opportunities from specialized providers, increasingly, information and communication technology will support collaboration across providers and connections to a broad range of opportunities."*

Building on the learnings gained through the PING project, along with the developments and models being utilized in other countries education systems, CEP believes the effective use of communication technology provides a real opportunity for the delivery of music learning for rural young people. From the experiences of these projects, and those of other communication technology approaches, CEP would propose a Blended Learning approach to the delivery of music learning that incorporates:

- Face to face learning within the students school
- Web based resource of music learning activities and materials.
- Regular online learning provision through the use of video conferencing, or web based learning platforms. This would also provide the opportunity to link to specialist musicians in providing programs such as instrumental music.

Such an approach would not only focus on the development of strategies for student learning, but also on building the capacity of teachers as to the effective use of communication technology to provide quality learning.

CEP would strongly recommend, that the state government provide resources to support the further development of the PING project, and to build on the models operating within other countries utilising communication technology to deliver music learning.

***In conclusion, CEP would be happy to explore these ideas further with the committee, and to provide more specific information on how it believes it could be developed and implemented.***