

Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools

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Date	14 February 2013
Job Title:	Current - Instrumental Music Coordinator, Monbulk College, Woodwind, brass & classroom music teacher Former - Dept of Education Instrumental Music Coordinator (Eastern Metro Region, 1999-2012)
SCHOOLS OF EMPLOYMENT:	
SCHOOL 1	NAME: Monbulk College ADDRESS: David Hill Rd, Monbulk VIC 3793 PHONE: 9751 9000 PRIVATE OR STATE: State TIME FRACTION: 0.8
SCHOOL 2	NAME: Tecoma Primary School ADDRESS: 1536 Burwood Hwy Tecoma VIC 3160 PHONE: 9754 2354 PRIVATE OR STATE: State TIME FRACTION: 0.1 (private employment, not on payroll)

Most of my teaching career has been teaching instrumental music in schools. Some of that has been in primary schools, mostly secondary. I taught for 8 years in elite private schools including Melbourne Grammar School and then went into the state system where I have been ever since. I was a Regional Music Coordinator for the Department of Education for 13 years, responsible for overseeing the provision of funding for Instrumental Music staff in schools. In this role I observed the breadth and depth music programs across Eastern Melbourne. I left this role at the end of 2012 in part because of the frustration I felt at the lack of support for music education (and education in general) in Victoria.

I welcome this inquiry and hope that from it comes a recognition and deeper understanding of what effective music education entails and the benefits it can provide to young people and society in general.

Please see below my responses to most of the terms of reference.

Regards

Yolande van Oosten

Terms of reference 1,2 and 3:

Evidence supporting music education in schools;

(1) benefits to society and to individual students wanting to pursue music as a career

Music is integral to everyday life for most Australians. We hear it on the radio, on TV, at concerts, when we are shopping and to augment sporting events. We use it to celebrate, to grieve, and in most key events in our lives music plays a part.

Fundamental to maintaining this richness in our culture into the future is educating children in music, especially PLAYING music. Without an upcoming generation of musicians, we risk narrowing our whole musical experience as a society to what has been created before, being played by an ever shrinking group of musicians performing to a gradually smaller audience.

For many students, music is the reason they go to school in the morning. They seek out opportunities to play together, to perform, to make music. They are curious to hear things they've never heard before. They are surprised when they finally get that phrase that they've been working on. Music is a collaborative social experience, but unlike sport, students can work hard towards a goal, a performance or an event without feeling that there has to be a winner and a loser.

I work in a music program where most of the students have never been to a formal classical music concert. Last year I took a gamble and took a group of year 9 students to rehearse with Orchestra Victoria for a 2-day free workshop in Werribee (a long way from Monbulk!). I knew that my students were at least a grade underneath the standard required (AMEB grade 4) yet I wanted to expose them to something new and inspire them. For the first hour or so sitting inside that huge orchestra their eyes were like saucers. But when they broke for their first break I could see how amazed and excited they were. Those 5 students are still talking about it. They will be going back for more this year. I feel sure that this experience has kept these students motivated to practice and continue learning their instruments possibly through VCE and beyond.

This is in a school where I get pressure from various angles to 'dumb down' the program and simply offer guitar and drums because 'that's what kids want'. Whilst guitar and drums are legitimate instruments of course, I am convinced that music education is about opening student minds up to a world of music, not just limiting them to what they think they already know and like.

(2) general benefits to students as a result of music education; and

(3) benefits to student academic performance as a result of music education;

- I have taught a number students on the autism spectrum who have done very well in music. They are frequently drawn to it as a different way of expressing themselves when other social contact may be awkward. One from 2012 has just gone on to study music at Melbourne University this year.
- I have a student who is very sullen and withdrawn in class who transforms into a different personality altogether when on stage. He becomes outgoing and suddenly has 'pizzaz'.
- I always notice at the end of year speech night how many students receiving awards are also instrumentalists.

- Learning an instrument helps students in their general studies because:
 - It forces them to be more organised
 - They have to work towards a goal over a period of weeks or months
 - They have to think creatively and deal with abstract concepts
 - They have to work together – an ensemble is only as good as its weakest member
 - They mentor each other – music groups often have students from across several year levels
- Musical intelligence is recognized as one of the ‘multiple intelligences’. Therefore, by offering music education, students who are weak in other areas have the opportunity to excel where they otherwise may not.

Terms of reference 4,5 and 6:

Current provision of music education in Victoria:

Current provision of music education in Victoria:

(4) music education provided through specific funding for music education;

(5) music education provided through non-specific funding, for example, general student resource package funding;

(6) music education provided through parent contribution

I will answer this from two positions, both within the Department of Education: firstly from my current role at Monbulk College and secondly from my experience 13 years at the Eastern Metropolitan Region (now North Eastern Victoria Region).

Monbulk College

Funding for instrumental music staff

We have two instrumental music staff: myself (0.6 instrumental and 0.2 classroom) and a singing teacher (0.2). Funding for our positions from the region covers approximately half our cost. This funding is entirely dependent on the number of students we have in the music program. If we lose students, our funding is reduced the following year. The rest comes from parent contribution and a school council funded component.

This leaves us as teachers in a difficult position because if we set high standards and expectations we run the risk of losing enrolments of students who are ‘just coasting’ but if we lower standards we also run the risk of disenchanting the high achievers. It is a balancing act in order to re-recruit students every year in order to keep the music program strong and keep the money coming in to fund the staff. If we raise levies, some students won’t be able to afford it, if we lower them, we may get more students but we may lose money and risk our own positions.

I receive a special payment of \$1,000 and 1 period a week to coordinate, however it is more like 10-15 hours a week in actual time spent on administration in what is a small music faculty.

Funding for music program budget

This year at Monbulk College, I have a budget of \$385 to run the whole department for the year. With this I am supposed to pay for:

- Sheet music for 3 ensembles @ \$100+ each piece of music (normally an ensemble would need 10-12 pieces a year)
- Tune 3 pianos @ \$200 each
- Photocopying – parts for 3 ensembles, notices, letters, forms

- Software
- Repairs and maintenance of equipment eg reeds, brass oils, music stands
- Reference materials, recordings etc

I have given no budget for equipment to purchase new instruments. Excursions and camps are all fully funded by parent contributions. I will probably be forced to fundraise, costing me and families in the music program time and energy that would be better spent doing other things.

Wider Region

In my time at the region as Instrumental Music Coordinator I was constantly amazed at the inequity of funding models for school music programs.

The region each year allocates a dollar amount to each secondary school which is dependent on the size of their music program from the previous year. We determined this based on an annual school audit, visits to the schools and audits of individual teachers' student numbers. This funding is SUPPOSED to be used for funding instrumental music staff, however schools can choose to divert that money to other parts of the school and unfortunately, some do.

On average, schools in the region have to top up the funding from Region by anything between 30 and 100%, mainly using parent contributions. Parents in the region pay anything from \$0 a year for lessons to well over \$1,000 per year, depending on which school they attend. Two students could be learning trumpet from the same teacher, but if they are in different schools, they might pay a vastly different levy for lessons.

Instrumental music teacher funding/pay

I was constantly dismayed and frustrated in my role by the inequity faced by instrumental music teachers (IMT's) in a number of ways:

- Many IMT's are paid casually, on local payroll in schools despite having working in these schools for year after year. They are entitled to be on central payroll and receive benefits (including sick leave, pay increments, long service leave) however they are either not aware of their rights or they are threatened that they will lose their job as the school 'can't afford' to pay them properly. Yet these teachers don't get paid for any additional hours they work for concerts, camps and other outside hours activities.
- This perpetuates the disenfranchised feeling that IMT's already have due to the fact that they are usually teaching across several schools in a week.
- The VIT has recently changed its definition of teaching (see TOR #8 below) and now, IMT's are not 'teaching' but 'tutoring' and do not require registration. This has enormous implications for non-qualified teachers as well as qualified ones as their job has been downgraded to the equivalent in the VIT's words of a sports coach. I have heard of staff in schools deciding that they no longer need to do professional development as they are no longer 'teachers' so why bother. There is a huge lack of respect and understanding at a departmental level of what music education involves.
- Jobs are now being regularly advertised for instrumental music 'teachers' on Recruitment Online as Education Support Staff, for jobs that have always been held by teachers, supervising and teaching students including at VCE level. Why would anyone consider studying for a teaching degree specialising in music if this is what awaits them?

Terms of Reference 7 - the extent and quality of music education provision in Victorian schools;

Monbulk College

At Monbulk College, we have very little classroom music. The program this year is: one semester at year 7 **or** 8 (3/4 periods per week), one semester at year 9 (4 periods per week). VCE music has been lost from the curriculum this year. We have lost out to drama, who managed to get a VCE class up for the first time this year. It is sad that the performing arts have to compete for many of the same students to run classes.

Within the instrumental music program we currently have a Senior Concert Band, a Junior Concert Band and a Choir. On total we have approximately 45 instrumental music students learning brass, woodwind and voice. We are hoping to introduce percussion and keyboard this year. There are currently three specialist music teachers in the faculty – myself (woodwind/brass/classroom music/coordination), another classroom music teacher and a voice teacher but none of us is full time music. We are all university/music trained.

School music events include: Annual Winter Concert and end-of year concert, Junior and Senior Soirees, Performing Arts Camp (3 days), a primary school tour and combined schools rehearsal days as well as performances at school (assemblies, open night etc). I plan on taking a group to see the MSO later this year as well as Orchestra Victoria Workshops. We don't participate in any festivals or Eisteddfods as I am concerned our small ensembles would feel swamped against big groups from established music schools.

All these events are currently at risk because of the current union bans and this is particularly upsetting as music teachers are in a 'damned if they do, damned if they don't position'. Events are integral to vital music programs and programs can collapse overnight if not nurtured (as unlike other subjects, students can give up at any time), yet we need the hours of extra work recognized by government.

Eastern Metropolitan Region (former)

Each year, since the mid-1990's, the region has produced an annual Youth Concert for 600-800 instrumental music students from schools across Eastern Melbourne to come together at the prestigious Arts Centre, Hamer Hall in a showcase of bands, choirs, soloists and orchestras. The concert was non-competitive, and cost students nothing to participate. Students had the opportunity to perform in one of the world's best venues to an audience of thousands and be part of something huge that they would remember for years to come. Students would be left buzzing afterwards and couldn't wait until the next year when they could rehearse and perform in such a fabulous event again.

This year, the concert will not run as the funding to regions has been slashed, and union bans have prevented staff from assisting. The concert itself has previously cost the government only a few thousand dollars and yet the benefit to thousands of students was long-lasting. It is saddening that this event may never happen again.

Terms of reference 8, 9, 10 and 11:

(8) optimum governance and oversight arrangements;

The VIT must revoke its current PERMISSION TO TEACH 2011 policy, which was designed to eliminate the need for registration for unqualified teachers. Their definition of what is teaching fails to take into account the intricacies of instrumental music programs and threatens the profession for all IMT's:

The policy states that permission to teach is only required if:

2. **the educational program is part of a curriculum that is**
 - a. **authorised by the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (e.g. VELS, VCE, VCAL); or...**
3. **the educational program forms part of the required curriculum for a student in that school...**

...Registration (for qualified teachers) and registration with permission to teach are required only where a person is undertaking the duties of a teacher and engaged for the delivery and/or assessment of student participation **in the required school curriculum...**

...Similarly sports coaches, **instrumental music** and other instructors engaged to instruct students in **extracurricular or co-curricular programs are generally not considered to be undertaking the duties of a teacher.**

(summarised from the VIT's Permission to Teach Policy 2011 – FAQ's for Principals document - http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/PTT%20Policy%202011/PTT_2011_FAQ Prin.pdf)

I see major problems with this policy:

1. According to the policy, almost no instrumental music teacher (qualified or not) needs VIT registration, as **there is no VCAA approved curriculum for instrumental music** at year 7-10. Only teachers with VCE students would need VIT registration. This would mean that depending on their enrolments from year to year some teachers would need registration one year but not the next. I have seen advertisements on Recruitment Online for Education Support Staff required to teach VCE music, which clearly goes against this policy and demonstrates the confusion felt by schools on this matter.

2. I know of only one or two schools where instrumental music forms part of the **required** curriculum. In the vast majority of schools, it is a co-curricular and elective subject. Therefore, this policy has implications for **all** IMT's, not just those holding Permission to Teach.

3. I am extremely concerned that the VIT seems to be under the belief that the role of instrumental music teachers is not considered to be teaching. They are in danger of seriously undermining the profession. If the universities were aware of this I believe they would be alarmed too, as there is no incentive for students to become qualified music teachers if they don't need registration to teach.

The policy is divisive and it is completely misguided in its understanding of what instrumental music teachers do. It threatens to undermine the status of the music teaching profession in Victoria. As it currently stands, even fully qualified instrumental music teachers do NOT need to hold registration in order to teach. The implications of this include:

- IMT's will not be paid as 'teachers' – this is already happening as I wrote previously re: Education Support Staff advertisements. The pay and entitlements of already marginalized IMT's are on shaky ground.
- Funding overall for IM programs will be at risk because the subject is not perceived as 'teacher-worthy', despite the fact that in order to study music at VCE students must **play** (and therefore have lessons on) an instrument.

The VIT should be endeavouring to raise standards. i.e. Make it easier to remove under-performing teachers. This is doing the opposite – good teachers will have their career options reduced and inferior, inexperienced teachers taking more positions as low paying positions are advertised.

I would like to see from the VIT:

A re-definition of the practice of instrumental teaching which:

- acknowledges that instrumental music instruction is valid as a form of ‘teaching’ rather than sports coaching etc
- demonstrates understanding of the non-compulsory nature of the subject
- takes into account the fact that there is no VCAA approved curriculum except at VCE level
- acknowledges the differences in practice between private school ‘tutors’ (who largely teach 1 to 1 and have no larger responsibility within a school) and state school IM teachers who have responsibility for:
 - o group teaching
 - o ensemble direction
 - o excursions
 - o recruitment and program development
 - o professional learning
 - o event production etc

Yolande van Oosten

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