

**Submission
No 35**

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mrs Monique Fruewirth

Date Received: 24 July 2024

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To: Members of the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW

Re: Inquiry into arts and music education and training in NSW

*From: _____, Educational Leader, former Head of Music in regional NSW Schools
(Govt and Independent) between*

Dear Committee Members,

Many thanks for providing me with the opportunity to respond to my observations regarding the state of music education and training in New South Wales. As a registered teacher in NSW between the dates stipulated, I was fortunate to have been appointed classroom music teacher and Head of Music in schools in southern New South Wales. As a city dweller coming straight from a high-fee paying independent well-resourced school, I was able to experience first-hand the challenges that regional communities face in procuring and retaining good quality teachers, and also learning to work within and challenge community perception on what music education is. It was a rich and rewarding experience. As Head of Music in a newly created independent school, I was charged with the responsibility of writing a Years 5 to 11 Scope and Sequence for approval/commissioning by the NSW Board of Studies. I had 4 weeks and the brief was that if I didn't meet the standard expected, that the school could be denied its license! Luckily I was able to work with someone from Shore School to create a framework that featured the fundamentals and some cross-curricular learning opportunities. In 2009 I had a life-changing experience. Faced with large classes of disengaged and somewhat misplaced students, I designed a program that incorporated teaching and learning around traffic safety, using music and film as a way for the students to connect with the subject and construct meaning. Students worked independently in small groups to create a short film with their own music composition created on Garage Band as a TAC (Traffic Accident Commission) style advertisement, which had to feature a tag line and dramatic effect in order to have maximum impact. An Organisation called VATSET organised for me to enter it into a William Angliss state-based competition which we won. Many police came to see the presentation and it was a seminal moment in my teaching career. Students were extremely proud and I like to think that I have saved some lives in educating young adults about driver safety in a regional town where children start driving cars on their properties at a very young age and operate heavy machinery to support farming activities.

I was also invited to teach music in a small remote government school called Bunnaloo Primary where student numbers at 52 dictated the amount of teaching staff possible and unfortunately they were not able to have a permanent music teacher. I was able to start a choir and we presented a performance attended by parents. It was a wonderful experience for the students and I felt really fortunate to have been a part of it.

I am potentially an over-qualified classroom teacher, in that I have a high level of prior learning beyond a DipEd which includes a Masters Degree and also a performance qualification (LMusA). I have a business background and I completed 5 years of a PhD in Australian Music. Having spent 12 years at university researching, writing and publishing, I have developed a curious mind and feel strongly that my way of being and doing is central to this. In 2010, I completed a Music Study Tour with Monash University Education Faculty that took me to schools in Europe to look at different music education models in schools in situ. It was a brilliant experience which has given me a very powerful insight into what is possible. I also experienced education as a student, completing some short courses in Kodaly, Dalcroze and Orff institutes.

I have so much more to say about the state of music education and what we need to consider if we would really like to improve accessibility, delivery and efficacy. There is a lot that we are doing well, but unfortunately it is extremely dependent on funding as the current model is extremely expensive to deliver. Is there another way? Most definitely.

If required, I would be really keen to talk further on any of the points raised. My approach has been more general and I have not provided footnotes or references to back it up as these are my observations as a teacher of many years. I have worked in all facets of a music department - as Instrumental Music Teacher (IMT), Classroom Music Teacher K-6 and 7-12, Assistant Director of Music, Director of Music and Acting Head of Music. I have an LMusA performance qualification and have taught private instrumental lessons for many years. I have taught French from Years ELC – 9 and am a qualified International Baccalaureate Diploma Program practitioner. I am a huge supporter of the IB program and believe that we have a lot to gain from incorporating the inquiry methodology more rigorously to place the student at the centre. With this unique set of perspectives, I can see the challenges faced by all of these roles in impacting on the direction of student learning.

I thank you for your consideration of my submission, and wish you all the best in your inquiry.

Your sincerely,

Submission to the Joint select Committee on Art and Music Education and Training in New South Wales

Inquiry into arts and music education and training in New South Wales

Response to Terms of Reference – 24 July 2024

1.(b) The quality and effectiveness of music education and training including references to some terms (i) – (xi)

Overview – Understanding Current Practices in 21st Century Music Education in Australia

Music Education in Schools: An Overview

Music is essentially a literacy subject dependent on the ability to communicate a specialised language. It requires the performer to understand and process an alphabetic and numeric language at various speeds of competency. It has traditionally required a high degree of literacy and skill as a performer and/or composer over many years, to be considered vocationally successful. Many classroom music programs focus on offering a “taster” experience – with a broad range of diverse activities provided to understand, listen, create and perform once or twice per cycle. They are designed to be engaging and fun with relatively low expectation in terms of developing performer competence. With the rapid rise of ICT as a 21st century learning tool, many schools both government and private are preferring to rely on technology to provide an array of virtual instruments (Garage band, Audacity, Ableton) and to fast-track the literacy requirement with preset chords and rhythms. This has shifted the teacher competence requirement away from performer to facilitator using technology as the more passive approach to music-making. It has in a sense removed this expectation of rigour and expense involved in mastery of the instrument, removing the requirement for an in-depth complex understanding of how the *music elements* are structured and interact (notation, rhythm, meter, articulation, dynamics, form, instrumentation, characteristics etc).

The Role of the Media in Shaping Perceptions of Success

In the last two decades, local and global media have played a crucial role in the development of expectation around both the standard of music education and the right to a music education. Although music has generally been considered to be an important part of the performing arts curriculum, it was often over-looked or neglected based on the incumbent teacher’s musical competency. Specialist music teachers were not considered essential in the delivery of curriculum in the K-6 years. and was often relegated to teachers with a special interest but no formal training.

There has been an explosion of interest in the perceived phenomena of the “yet-to-be” discovered performer that has had a huge impact on the way that music performance has been perceived by the Australian and global communities. Highly emotive, programs like “The Voice” and “Australia’s got Talent” have made the rise of the hidden attractive (and sometimes troubled) young performer song-writer look easy, and the expectation attached to this is that the opportunity for success is there for everyone.

This has had both a positive and negative effect on the way that music performance has been viewed by educators and consumers. It has raised awareness of the positive therapeutic effect

that music performance can have on young individuals; it has raised the popularity of singing, drum and guitar playing which has increased the appetite for contemporary performance; it has raised the hopes and dreams of young performers and simultaneously the profile of a young musician in our collective consciousness from “nerdy” to “cool”. The perception of instant fame, that “anyone can do it” – the young tradie/gardener that sings like an opera singer/jazz singer/country blues singer – has raised the profile of music within the community. However, in doing so, it has changed the trajectory of our educational goals in music. Where once upon a time traditional music styles were upheld as the pinnacle and teaching standards in schools reflected this, the contemporary music genre and its popularity both vocationally and recreationally begs the question: have we acknowledged this in our current teaching and learning frameworks in music education? What is our role and responsibility as educators? Where does it start, and where does it stop? Who is setting the standard, and why is this important to know? What or who does this standard represent?

To whose tune are we dancing?

Traditionally, private high-fee paying schools have led the way in music curriculum reform in Australia. These schools have favoured traditional, long-established methods of teaching and learning as the hallmark of their success. It responds to their demographic, which places high value on the test of time. Challenging the traditional is difficult to do when the lens through which they view their perceived success is limited. Is it relevant to continue to structure music education programs and curriculum around traditional views of what essential skills (performance) are required and what success looks like? Have we really considered what music means to us in the 21st century and which skills we want to promote (creativity) in a world where problem-solving and new ideas is valued over idolatry, imitation and plagiarism? Given that most people do not engage with music making or listening as a high-art form (think classical), should we continue to teach music through the lens of the 20th century?

So why is this even an issue? It is an issue because currently wealthy schools which are seen to set the education benchmark, are delivering an expensive, 20th century three-tier music curriculum which focuses on performance as the pinnacle experience over creativity and curiosity about what is possible. The Australian Curriculum (AC) forms one of the three pillars that traditionally, represent a music education typical of most independent schools. Many of these schools have young musicians K-12 who are receiving the benefit of many years of expensive external support toward exceptional performance standards which schools utilise by developing expensive ancillary programs (co-curricular ensemble program). Where the classroom-based curriculum programs fail to deliver the depth and breadth of learning required, the cocurricular programs step in to support student performance and provide a sense that the learning is being delivered to a high standard. This is the model that many schools aspire to, but not all can afford. It has created a divide in music education based on the demographic and socio-cultural focus of the school, and in itself is not offering equity in terms of opportunity or achievement.

Other Factors that Influence the Delivery of Continuous Classroom Music Programs

Despite having a mandated K-10 Australian Curriculum that provides a comprehensive map for teaching and learning of music in the classroom, the quality and effectiveness of music education in Australian private and government sector primary and secondary schools is still largely **dependent on the prevailing attitudes towards music of the school executive the teaching community, and the broader school community.** The socio-cultural and

demographic make-up of the school also has an impact on the desire and ability to source and sustain ancillary programs that support music curriculum (classroom music). Quality music education (the ability to provide continuous, competent, diverse and rich curriculum) relies on the successful integration and *balance* of **three pillars or silos** (listed below) of transformative music education (that which produces a high standard of music literacy, enabling a degree of creativity and of practical competency):

A. Compulsory “**Classroom**” **Music K-8 Curriculum**-based program, and a more selective Classroom Music focus as an elective Years 9 – 12. It is an “**inclusive**” program, because it is compulsory and open to all students regardless of prior learning.

B. **Co-curricular Music** experiences are ensemble-based performance-oriented (students learning music together on an instrument in groups of 25-30 students). Sometimes incorporated into the classroom music curriculum as a hybrid program at years 2-3, 5-6 or Year 7 but is also offered outside the curriculum to performers with a degree of competency. Programs include Orchestras, Bands and choral groups and although open to all students they are often auditioned and “**exclusive**” due to the fact that students need to have a competent degree of performance and music literacy experience.

c. **Extra Curricular** fee-for-service opt-in music education focussing on instrumental music performance. These programs are usually expensive to run and the fees are high. They are an “**exclusive**”.

Music education is usually presented as complete discrete silos, in that schools must at the very least offer the baseline education (A) which is part of the broader curriculum. It may or may not include elements of (B) depending on the wealth of the school and its ability to procure and fund a variety of instrumental music teachers (IMTs) (at least 4-5) to deliver the programs and small group tuition. Unlike classroom music teachers, who have a broader focus and ability to deliver all of the practical, creative and literacy-based activities, IMTs are specialists on their instruments and teach one-to-one or in very small groups. They are highly qualified as practitioners but usually not qualified as teachers. This means that they can really only operate to **assist** schools in delivering classroom music programs. The depth and focus of their knowledge is great, however they are not considered by the state to have the teaching qualifications to develop and deliver the broader curriculum. The net effect of this is that the pool of generalist classroom music teachers is shrinking as more leave the profession, and the pool of specialist instrumental music teachers is growing. The cost of employing the latter group is extremely high and most schools use the (C) fee-for service offering to leverage those costs. Performing Arts Faculties are expensive to run, and this is why it is that independent schools that are high-fee paying are able to deliver all of the options listed above. They do, of course, offer a very attractive marketing proposition as ensembles that are featured in (B) and (C) are able to be publicly promoted as representative of a “high-performing” school. The net effect of this is that (B) and (C) have now become the drivers in music education and expectations around delivery in schools is based on the success of this expensive and “exclusive” model.

Unpacking the Three Pillars of Music Education in Australia – To be or not to be?

We have established that privileged private and some selective entry government schools situated in urbanised communities, are able fund and provide all of the three aforementioned pillars – **curriculum, co-curricular, and extra-curricular** – and they use them to successfully market themselves to prospective families. High fee-paying schools are albeit under constant

pressure not only to meet but to exceed expectations of parents and are able to accommodate and offer on-site fee for service lessons, and a wide range of performance (ensemble) experiences in addition to the curriculum offering. Some private schools also have cocurricular “academies of excellence” which have recently entered the sphere.

The Power of Music in Marketing

Music performance (as opposed to music composition or investigation studies) can be successfully marketed due to its portability and ability to be showcased in a public forum. Ensemble and solo performance programs promote the perception that all students have access to a variety of music-making opportunities throughout their education. Positioned as “inclusive” it is actually only available for those who have the financial means to commit to years of expensive lessons and have the time to dedicate to practice. Most schools with this model cater for some not all: they offer an auditioned “exclusive” rather than “inclusive” approach to music making and it is limited to performance only. In these Schools, classroom music programs (curriculum) at Years 2/3 5/6 and Year 7 have adopted a hybrid approach using cocurricular small-group delivery (learning an instrument for a year) under the tutelage of IMTs in classroom curriculum time. Although expensive, it serves to ultimately encourage student retention on their nominated instruments and provision of services to the IMTs which rely on individual lessons as an income stream within the extra-curricular stream known as The Music School.

The Impact of Covid, the Teacher Exodus and Teacher Support

Despite the best efforts of ACARA to provide an Australian Curriculum in music that is “more accessible” for teachers in terms of addressing the scope of some of the delivery difficulties that both urban and regional schools currently experience, there have been a combination of unfortunate events (COVID, teacher exodus) that have impacted on both government and private sector schools to deliver robust programs, related to staffing. The dearth of qualified teachers to deliver music education has resulted not only in the minimisation of opportunities, but the quality of teaching that a robust music program depends upon. In schools that cannot access or offer basic music education that incorporates (A) and (B), the impact of this on student learning in terms developing competency more broadly in literacy and numeracy general, is dire.

Let’s Sing!

Many years ago in the previous century, primary years classroom teachers were able to turn on the “wireless” and follow along to the “Let’s Sing” choral program offered by the ABC. This incredibly accessible program was pivotal in providing a music education of sorts that was inclusive and equitable as it encouraged all students to use their voices together to expressive themselves with a basic line-up of instruments that included body percussion and stationery such as rulers and whatever rudimentary instruments the school had at its disposal. The “syllabus” was presented as a booklet with indigenous and non-indigenous songs and activities which all schools had access to as a classroom set. The presenter ran the class, with the teacher supporting the presenter and leading the learning. Although these programs were phased out early this century, the impact of this program was great and classroom teachers today still use these resources to deliver curriculum. This program was incredibly powerful in that it offered a performance-based option to remote schools and regional schools that were unable to source music specialists. As previously mentioned, the current teacher shortage in specialist literacy subjects has no safety net akin to the ABC Let’s Sing program and as such, many students will not be able to experience the incredible neurological and cognitive benefits that only a

continuous early years to middle years music education can provide (as espoused by Dr Anita Collins – Bigger Better Brains).

By virtue of location: The Role of Regional Conservatoria in supporting Music Education

As mentioned previously, regional and remote school are at a distinct disadvantage in delivering AC outcomes. Their staffing resources often dictate what is taught and how and is reliant on the incumbent IMT's personal level of expertise. Generalist classroom music teachers are also difficult to procure and oftentimes, teachers with a "passion" for music are asked to deliver the subject and their ability to read, understand and teach the literacy aspects of music are challenged.

Regional Conservatoria of NSW by virtue of their location, have also been subject to the same difficulties that schools have in terms of procuring musically-qualified staff. To be a qualified musician capable of delivering music instruction to students in all aspects of their development (as performer, creator, investigator), they need to have completed a Music Performance degree (Bachelor of Music Performance) at a minimum or have a demonstrated ability as a performer only. The first option is the most desirable, however the second option is the most common particularly in regard to 'contemporary musicians'. Guitar/Ukulele players, Vocalists and percussionists are usually less able to read music and rely on what is referred to as "tablature" as relevant to their instrument. Keyboard instruments present a much higher degree of difficulty in terms of reading fluency and executing the sheer number of permutations and combinations of pitches. The preponderance of those musicians in regional centres is high and they are the most likely to be employed in regional educational institutions and are relied upon as "experts" in their field. As their experience is less broad and so many of them do not have formal teaching qualifications, their ability to write a robust and continuous curriculum as an IMT is compromised. They more often than not, adopt a very ad hoc approach to teaching and rely heavily on the enthusiasm of the student and parents to achieve beyond a satisfactory outcome.

NSW Regional Conservatoria have experienced some financial difficulty in the past and have been subject to dubious guardianship. Rorting of funds and preferential appointments in the past have affected the fee-paying programs (B and C) on offer and this has impacted on broader music education opportunities. Some regional government schools have relied on conservatoria to outsource their music education and have received option (B and C) masquerading as option (A). The issue with this is that the learning is only offered through a performance-based lens and subject to the knowledge strength of the IMT that is delivering the program who is not a teacher with full NSW BoS registration. The assessment component of the student learning is, in these circumstances, highly subjective without reference to the AC outcomes for each level. In those circumstances, schools are relieved that "music" is being taught and feel that they can "tick that box" without having a full understanding of the scope and sequence that high-quality program can deliver. Teacher mentoring is the most powerful way to change this. Regional music teachers are often isolated and the demands of their jobs mean that professional development is delivered in an ad hoc and generalist way. If all regional teachers were connected to a leading teacher in this area within NSW and invited by selected schools to shadow and develop curriculum in tandem with that school, it may give them more confidence to develop and deliver strategies to overcome some of these issues. Embedding the notion of the teacher as "learner" is crucial to the success of this type of program. Instruments that are portable such as voice, ukulele, guitar, djembe drums or bucket drums are extremely popular in general and the reason for this that they are able to be successfully performed with a lesser degree of effort than the keyboard, violin etc. They are able to deliver the same learning outcomes as a part of a classroom music program (A)

but require much less time to develop competency. Teacher training is the key and short courses are a very cost-effective way of delivering content to time-poor staff.

In regional independent schools, the situation is much the same as it is highly dependent on visiting staff and the randomness of degree of competency of those staff. The difference is that when those staff come to regional towns, the competition for their services is great and ostensibly they will go to independent schools as they are generally offered either a higher remuneration, better working conditions (dedicated well-resourced spaces for teaching and learning instruments/classrooms), more students (as they are paid per head) or a combination of the above. Although city schools are moving to a more permanent remuneration package for their IMTs in line with the classroom teaching conditions of remuneration, most country schools still consider IMTs as peripatetic staff and pay them per student. Many IMTs are asked to manage the payment of lessons themselves as a sub-contractor to the school and as such the school is fulfilling the brief to provide Extra Curricular lessons (C) without having to provide the other statutory obligations in terms of sick pay, personal leave, superannuation etc. This therefore does not attract high-performing IMTs and they will always prefer to be employed permanently as a member of staff and not a subcontractor.

The issue of permanent staff retention in regional and remote schools needs to be addressed here. Many staff in regional schools tend to stay in their awarded position much longer than teachers in city schools because options for reemployment in a similar school are limited. This is also the case for classroom music teachers and any other music teachers that have guaranteed tenure. The issue with this is one that we face in all areas of teaching and learning and try to remedy with robust professional development programs. Suffice to say that where a teacher is continuing to deliver a low-quality classroom music program (A) that focuses on providing music as “entertainment” rather than as an incremental skill-based learning or “doing” opportunity, little can be done to address this. The only exception to this is where schools are able to raise the funds to offer a hybrid learning opportunity (A) + (B) combined.

What does a successful music education look like?

Good question. It can present in many different ways. The most obvious way, is to measure how many students move from studying classroom music in the compulsory primary/middle years to senior years when it is offered as an elective. Less obvious perhaps is counting how many students use their skills that they have achieved in those early years of studying music, to participate in the broad range of Performing Arts opportunities? Do you have a student who wasn't confident to sing, but now has a lead role in the school production? Do you have students who were shy and through developing performance skills are now thriving in front of an audience? Do you have students who may have started on an instrument in the hybrid curriculum/co-curricular program and have become curious about writing and producing their own shows as entertainers? How open has the school been in creating opportunities for performers outside of the perceived norms of performance art (composer, lyricist, comedian, contemporary dancer, vlogger, circus performer)? How the school responds to developing opportunity is everything. The siloed approach to teaching and learning within the performing arts is really holding us back. Inter-disciplinary approaches are so much more powerful to the student as it reveals possibilities that they may not have considered. Schools that combine drama/English/song/writing/film/media in their activities are much more powerful in promoting and supporting diversity and creativity in the developmental spectrum of the student. Regional schools have an incredible opportunity to combine their expertise and to work more collaboratively in writing rich and deep programs that give students agency. Successful music education is about considering what is possible and to

do that you need confident, curious, and courageous teachers who can create rich programs that respond uniquely to their cohort, no matter what financial constraints prevail. We need to support new teachers to consider what is possible so that the fixed siloed approach to learning which values the anachronistic view of instrumental performance as the most successful educational outcome in music and the performing arts is retired and performing arts classroom teachers work together to develop programs that focus on the intersection of music and drama and dance as opportunities for student-led creative expression.

In Summary.

The out-dated twentieth century stereotype of a musician in a suit or dress that was quietly appreciated by audiences in concert halls for displaying mastery of their instrument has fallen foul to the twenty-first century notion of success in music which is based on image, marketability, financial success and relatability. And yet, we continue to promote this out-dated ideal in the way that our schools teach and promote music. Is this viable? **The evolution of music education is a given and we need to ask ourselves whether the current music curriculum framework is responding adequately to this and offering inclusive equitable and engaging programs within the school remit.** Should we continue to deliver programs that promote exclusivity in music education and is this our role? What do “inclusive” programs look like and how do we create programs that value creativity over mastery? Does mastery have a place in schools within the classroom or is this the responsibility of student/family? There are many other models of music education in other countries that have successfully navigated this conundrum in order to escape the crowded curriculum, with exceptional results and this is worth further investigation and consideration.