

**Submission  
No 96**

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

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## Submission for the Inquiry into Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales

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I have a 'long obedience in the same direction' in the area of Music education. As a Kinder – Year 6 Music teacher, focusing on developing and teaching sequential music programs appropriate for each Stage and Year group in my school, I have taught for over 30 years. I have also written Music course work books for Kinder – Year 4, and solfa orientated recorder/chime bar books for Year 1 & 2, which have been in use for many years in my school. I have taught individuals in piano, clarinet and musicianship classes throughout that time from Beginner to Associate level, and have taught senior Music 2, English and Mathematics at times. I play piano each week for church, and for special church occasions. I accompany students for concerts, AMEB examinations and music parties regularly. I have experienced the great joy of sharing music with many, many children and adults over my years as a music educator. I am happy to contribute to this Inquiry in any way that is of service.

I would like to speak to the following terms of reference, chiefly from my personal experience as a teacher in the private school sector, at the infants-primary level:

### (b) the quality and effectiveness of music education and training, including:

- (i) progress towards a long-term goal of quality music education, including actions to address identified barriers
- Unfortunately the quality of music education in schools varies from little or no musical education – from as little as one lesson in a term – to effective, comprehensive class music education, depending on the school and the musical expertise of the teachers in the school.
  - I would argue that the biggest barrier to quality music education is the avoidance of musical literacy as a worthy and necessary aim for all primary school students. By this I don't mean literacy related to musical matters (as addressed in the new syllabus in NSW) but the reading and writing of music itself. Musical literacy, "hearing what you see and seeing what you hear" is a remarkable skill, unique to Music, and accessible to all children, if taught carefully (and with joy!)
  - Children should be taught to read, write and compose music, with the use of standard (or close to standard) musical notation from a young age. Other notations are of course beneficial and of interest, but why not give children the tools to learn the universal, boundary-defying notation that is in fact used world-wide? Students without musical literacy can listen, perform, understand and improvise in a limited way. Currently this is all we require in our schools.

- Not requiring musical literacy means children reach a glass ceiling they cannot penetrate without funds and/or further opportunities, that could be best given in schools, where their fundamental preparation for lifetime learning occurs. This is akin to teaching our students to speak, communicate and listen, but never read fluently. Or explaining general cosmological ideas without mathematics. Useful and enjoyable, but we would never dream of willingly condemning our children to a lifetime without reading for themselves, by reasoning that not everyone is going to be a writer. We would never omit the teaching of thorough numeracy because not all students will be mathematicians and scientists. **We should all try to give children the basic tools they need to take up any interest or profession.** But thousands of children are denied the opportunity to enjoy, play and participate in music for themselves in later life through a lack of proper early training.

(ii) the present level and status of [primary] formal music education...

- It is sad that there is a lack of defined and stringent standards for music education in NSW schools, such that every child can have a thorough, sequential, content-rich education in Music. The generally poor and declining state of school music education is obvious. Individuals, especially with means, can access excellent private music teachers, out-of-school choirs and other organisations. Some schools have instrumental tutors and band programs in place, but many or **most children are missing out on the excellent, song-based, pedagogically sound education that could be available to all children, regardless of socio-economic status, or location.** The **thoroughly trained teacher in a classroom** and a **well sequenced, developmental program** are powerful educational tools that cross almost every barrier to content-rich, effective, lasting and enjoyable music education.

(iii) robust and evidence-based music education in initial teacher education courses in the tertiary sector

- Creative Arts Syllabuses in NSW over the years have provided for a great deal of flexibility for schools, which is essential in a context of **minimal pre-service musical training** for teachers. We are all aware that preservice training for teachers in Music is at an all-time low. Even anecdotally, we all know older teachers who were trained at university/college to learn or improve their own musical skills and taught specifically musical pedagogy during their standard training. We all know younger

teachers who get little or no music training, and who graduate with no confidence or desire to incorporate meaningful music education into their classrooms, beyond the odd song or Youtube clip. Some are not even aware that they are missing this rich tool for relationship and educational benefits in the classroom. This state of affairs has been obvious for many years, recently researched and documented in the **Fading Notes: Music Education for the Next Generation of Primary Teachers** paper generated by the Alberts/Tony Foundation group. Why not finally address this problem? Why not require and provide high quality teaching and learning of Music in schools? Why not train all infants and primary teachers in time-honored, proven, educationally sound music programs? **Properly trained early childhood and primary teachers could have the confidence to lead their children in childhood songs, aural training, games, childrens' dances, listening, creative tasks, and so many other rich, imaginative experiences.** It would transform their classrooms for other learning too!

- As a child I remember that in Year 2 **I had an excellent teacher**, in a government public school, who taught us childrens' songs and the recorder. She introduced us to great classical pieces of music, that everybody knew. She was not a musician, but (in hindsight) had obviously been well taught in teacher training. Our whole class loved Music lessons, and our teacher! We could sing songs our parents and grandparents sang, and learnt new songs, and songs that were sung in countries we had never seen. We learnt to listen to sounds, and place them into grids of formal understanding which meant we could ultimately be creative in an informed way. We were apprenticed to a body of knowledge, that was ours to conquer as we grew, with the help of teachers.
- With musical literacy, a huge body of music and musical experiences was opened up to us. I asked for, and was lucky enough (with a sales rep dad and three siblings) to start piano lessons when I was in Year 3; the only one in my family. I know the sacrifice that was, for my parents. **Music was counted as an important pursuit.** Music (especially in the classical tradition) was highly regarded in society too – a worthy discipline to pursue of itself – as was the idea of becoming an educated person. One factor that could contribute to a quality music education is a level of **cultural musical literacy**, where children listen to and seek to understand significant musical works from the past, as well as contemporary works which contribute to our musical culture.
- I was fortunate enough to attend a high school which had specialist music teachers and a rigorous music program centred around singing, punctuated by Musica Viva in Schools concerts and SSO Schools concerts, which were (happily!) compulsory. I had no idea I would become a musician, though I was playing piano and clarinet at a fairly high standard by then. I liked lots of things. Looking back, **I see that I received much from my school education which would have been impossible without well-trained teachers and a context that valued music education.**
- My pathway into the primary teaching of Music was a little unusual, having had a training to diploma levels in clarinet and piano, with a teaching component, and having an Arts degree, majoring in Linguistics. I decided to become a secondary

school teacher after my first degree, so I then trained towards Secondary English and History. When my school asked me to teach and write programmes for K – 6 Music, I listened to experienced teachers, read widely, and submitted to the framework provided by Hoermann and Bridges' in their **Developmental Music Program**, which was an excellent training pedagogically, in the more specific skills I needed for teaching classroom music, rather than firstly being a music practitioner, or a piano/clarinet/musicianship teacher. Each of these roles is quite distinct in my life now, but of course they overlap and augment each other. I had the in-depth knowledge and skills I needed for the work I do.

- Young teachers I am mentoring require much guidance at the level of lesson planning for a content and skills-rich Music lesson, as well as often needing pointers with regard to musical knowledge itself. These students have all had a modicum of music training, (outside of university) but not enough specific and helpful aural, musical and theoretical training in their degrees to be excellent classroom music educators. *It seems Music is not considered important enough in schools, or in teacher training institutions* (outside the Sydney Conservatorium).
- *Robust and evidence-based and also time-honoured pedagogy in initial teacher education courses is crucial to the revitalization of Music in NSW*, indeed nationally. Teachers must be given the musical knowledge and skills to train school students adequately. Sydney University (Conservatorium) students have a high level of training, but many other institutions do not provide the basics. Primary teachers do not need to have a diploma in music performance to teach music well! However every early childhood teacher should be training in music, so they can feel the beat, teach basic rhythm, sing, play musical games and dance with their students. Every primary teacher should have musical training, so they can sing, with an understanding of pitch and basic structure. They should learn to play a little on an instrument, so they can teach a basic classroom instrument such as the recorder, chime bars or ukele. They should read and write rhythm and basic pitch patterns, play improvising and composition games and learn childrens' dances to do with their classes. *This kind of training, once considered vital content for university students, has been whittled away, along with direct musical pedagogy training*, in favour of issues-driven curricula. No one doubts that tertiary training should be relevant, but this should never come at the expense of necessary teaching content. I have not come across a (non-Conservatorium) university student who has been given a proper (or any) training in musical pedagogy for many years.

(v) the efficacy of the current primary...school curriculum in delivering learning outcomes in music related subjects

- The current school Music curricula in NSW make the best of a bad situation. I have attended many inservices and training sessions for teachers over the years where the assumption is made that reading music is hard, and it is not to be demanded of students. The general primary teacher has not been trained to a point of competence in Music. The curriculum has had musical content watered down for a long time, demanding very little in musical knowledge, musical terms and specific musical skills and terms. The best final results of a NSW primary music education for children, completed solely in the classroom, is skills in singing, movement, improvising and composition. This is good, but not good enough. **In the effort to be sure that no one feels intimidated by musical knowledge, we have robbed a generation of the capability to read and write music.** Of course creativity is not the sole domain of those literate in music, but for most practitioners **musical literacy is the key to long-lived and deep engagement with the musical arts.** Even for young children, giving specific, technical musical boundaries allows for easy, confident creativity.
- **Quality Music education is accessible to all kinds of learners.** Each discipline has its unique language and symbols. Music is distinctive in that it is a concrete art form, with aural communication directly from the music itself to the mind and heart. Words are not the primary method of communication, but rather the music itself. Music has logical structures, mathematically rigorous subdivisions and macrostructures, a physical manifestation both for performer and listener and of course its emotional, affective element. These occur from the simplest folk song to the most complex symphony. There is something for every kind of learner in Music. Children can start on this lifetime of learning, in school at a basic level.
- **All infants and primary students would benefit from regular, sequential, pedagogically sound musical training in the school classroom.** Neurological benefits for children are constantly proven in current research. Social and community-building benefits are obvious when children sing and perform music together. 'Every classroom a choir' is still a good start for music education. Positive personal and mental health benefits are in sore demand in our culture, which is generally forcing children to shoulder increasingly adult burdens, in the education system, and in society.
- We have all seen the research about the **transfer of confidence, skills and competence from music to other learning spheres.** I have encountered so many students – at least one a year – who is a poor reader of books, or is identified with learning difficulties, but is capable in music, not because they study it outside of school, but because music engages so many distinctive parts of a child's body, brain

and imagination. These students find they are capable and happy in Music, and this confidence brims over into their other school studies.

- There are many research studies available as to why a thorough and well-taught music education is incredibly beneficial for children (from strugglers to the talented) and they delineate the positive mental health outcomes related to both intensive, sequential music studies and the benefits of studying a musical instrument. I will not attempt an academic literature survey here, nor address the music tutoring systems in schools, but I wish to recommend **excellent class music programs** and the **learning of classroom instruments** (yes, even the maligned recorder!) **in the context of a singing-based curriculum as the most effective and enjoyable remedy** to the current malaise in Music education in schools. These solutions are cheap, relative to their benefits, yet educationally rich.
  
- **Recommendations**
  - Make curriculum requirements in Music that are rigorous in specifically musical content
  - Add requirements at the curriculum level for developmentally appropriate musical literacy from the earliest years, in the context of singing-based class music programs that include opportunities for regular, sequential class instrument playing
  - Require an increase the scope and quality of pre-service primary teacher training in the disciplines of music, so all primary teachers are educated and equipped to provide excellent music education to our children