

EDITORIAL

Editorial: What is music education for?

One of the privileges of being an academic is being able to attend international conferences. Now that the world is returning to some sort of normality following COVID and lockdowns, these are increasingly happening in-person. What this means is that it is not just in the presentations that we get to meet and talk to people from countries other than our own, but especially in the coffee breaks and food opportunities that are vital aspects of such gatherings. What can be a common feeling at these events is to talk to people whose everyday lived experiences of music education can be so far from our own as to be almost unrecognisable. Take the case of the USA and the UK. In the USA, as far as we can understand it, the music education system at what they call ‘high school’ is predicated on what Butler and Wright (2020, p. 100) referred to as the ‘... triumvirate of wind band, choir, and orchestra, the omniscient conductor/pedagogue, and the associated Western Art music repertoire’. This is a long way away from the English National Curriculum (DfE [Department for Education], 2013), founded as it is on the three main musical components of composing, performing and listening, and taken by all children (in schools that are obliged to follow the National Curriculum) up until the age of 14 years old. From talking to American academic colleagues, it would seem to be the case that success in US terms is often measured by how many trophies the performing ensemble can display in the trophy cabinet. In England, success in music education is not measured by collections of silverware but by how well pupils do in public examinations. Comparing the USA and UK in this way is not meant to be judgemental, it is done simply to show very obvious and possibly surface-level differences. Similar comments could probably be made about any two given music education systems the world over.

But what happens when you start to dig a little deeper, and ask difficult questions about what music education is for in various different jurisdictions? We know that learning to play an instrument and/or sing is a major component of music education internationally, but scratch this surface and ask another question – ‘why’? This becomes much harder to answer. When we add what we might term generalist classroom music education into this mix, the issue is compound further still. This gives rise to the very important question ‘why are children learning music?’

In England currently, there are national funding debates taking place concerning elite musical performing ensembles, as the fundholder, Arts Council England (ACE), is faced with the inevitable problem of not having enough money to go round. Consequently, ACE is having to make difficult redistributive monetary decisions, which those faced with a reduction in their central funding obviously see as being cuts. Likewise, the national broadcaster, the BBC, encountering the same problems, is considering scrapping its centrally funded choir, one of the few such professional outfits in the country. Such decisions are met with cries of concern in the media, and people then move, almost in a single bound, to talking about the role that music education has to play in this. Listening to some of the arguments put forward it might be thought that the whole purpose of music education is to provide an audience for existing (mostly western classical, it seems) ensembles to sell more tickets, or to put ‘bums on seats’, as is said in the vernacular. This seems problematic. Is the purpose of physical education and sport in schools to provide an audience for major and minor sporting fixtures, is that the main reason why children and young people study the subject in school? What about active participation? This could be seen to be another example of where vested interests cannot see beyond their own immediacy of

funding issues and assume a universality of their own problems, to which education appears to be the answer.

But again, if we take yet another step back and consider music education on the world stage, what commonalities does music education in Brighton, Birmingham (UK), Birmingham (USA), Bloemfontein, Brisbane, Beijing, Bogota, Brussels, Bordeaux and Bergen (to name but a few beginning with ‘B’) possess? Indeed, are there any commonalities at all? We know that in some places music education is free at the point of delivery when part of the state-run school system, and in other places it is a paid-for add-on. In some places, it is all about one-to-one instrumental lessons, and in others a generalist classroom approach is taken. There are so many variations that producing simple answers to this issue is fraught with problematic issues. Some years ago, at the 2017 *International Symposium on Assessment in Music Education*, one of the co-editors of the *British Journal of Music Education* (Fautley) and the distinguished American Academic Timothy S Brophy were involved in the creation of a set of international principles for assessment in music education (Brophy & Fautley, 2018; Brophy, 2019). This was a complex task and highly problematic to try to make the principles work for international audiences. It is mentioned here in order to provoke thoughts about yet another stepping back – a ‘golden thread’ running through this editorial. Would it be possible to construct a set of international principles for music education itself? What would such a thing entail? Would such a set of principles be considered desirable, or useful, even? How could it ensure inclusion across all the range of various music and educational systems? Intriguingly, at the time of writing, the website search engine *Google Scholar* produces zero hits for the string ‘international principles for music education’, so clearly this is either so difficult that no-one has attempted it or so overwhelming that people have shied away from it! However, we do know that the *European Association for Music in Schools* (EAS) have been working in this area for some years, so maybe on a pan-European basis there might well be such a project.

But this is the whole point and purpose of our profession, we are concerned with research into music and music education, and yet it seems to be so broad, so diffuse, so different, so contextually entwined with location and place that, as Lincoln and Guba (2000) observed in the title of their article, ‘The only generalization is: There is no generalization’! Does this matter for us? Maybe it does, and, as the attendance at international conferences shows, we cannot take for granted international reception and understanding of our work in any meaningful way. Our context is not someone else’s context, and their context may be unique. The list of places beginning with the letter ‘B’ above should show us that there is more to what is going on than we can see on a day to day basis, and, as with travel to academic conferences, maybe we can learn something about ourselves from the ways others do things, and maybe too this helps us step back (yet again) from our quotidian existence, and really give some thought to the question that forms the title of this editorial, *what is music education for?*

All of which brings us neatly to this present issue of the *British Journal of Music Education*, which, as ever is jam-packed with articles highlighting the breadth of music education and music educators; each article could also be considered as a provocation for us to keep the consideration of ‘what is music education for’ central to our own reflections.

This edition opens with an appreciation of William (Bill) Salaman, former editor of the *British Journal of Music Education* who sadly passed away at the start of 2023. It is written by Bill’s *BJME* co-editor, Piers Spencer. We are very grateful to Piers for writing this piece and particularly to Bill and Piers for the work they did in developing the journal during their editorship, taking over the reins of the journal in 1998 from the founding editors, John Paynter and Keith Swanwick. We send our condolences to Bill’s family and friends.

This current edition is packed with 10 articles which, as ever, highlight the broad church of music education. The first of these is a fascinating article from Susan Young: ‘Where neoliberalism and neoconservatism meet: the inception and reception of a Model Music Curriculum for English Schools’. As the title outlines, this article makes the case for the importance of ‘analysis that explicitly focuses on political ideologies and their present-day rhetoric and discourses’. Young

notes that the Department for Education's non-statutory Model Music Curriculum 'reveals both the power held by the minister to dictate the direction of the curriculum and how that power is dispersed to a diversity of interested parties whose values are those of the market rather than common good'. Having explored this in detail, particularly in relation to the current direction of travel in music education in England, the article goes on to consider 'the general early years sector in England is an illustration for how to respond to state interventions in curriculum that might be emulated by the music education sector'. As the author points out, the issues raised in this article have much relevance across music education within and beyond the UK. More articles about music in early childhood can be accessed in the excellent special edition of the *British Journal of Music Education*, guest edited by Susan Young and published in 2022 (Volume 39, Issue 3, November 2022).

The next two articles are concerned with different aspects of studying instrumental music. Karenda Devroop's article, 'Impact of studying practical instrumental music on the psychological well-being of disadvantaged university students', reports on a study from a large university department in South Africa and explores the possible relationships between optimism, self-esteem, happiness and participation in an instrumental music ensemble. It shows promising findings relating to the potential of engagement in instrumental music that 'can be viewed as a potential intervention in bringing about social and psychological change in disadvantaged university-level students'. Ida Knutsson's article 'Challenges and tension fields in classical instrumental group tuition: interviews with Swedish Art and Music School teachers' explores the shift in 1:1 teaching towards models of group tuition. The tensions it highlights between 'progression' and 'inclusion' will no doubt resonate with many teachers and programmes around the world. The article offers some interesting findings about what measures for successful teaching could be useful beyond the usual quantitative measures that are concerned with continuation rates and measuring skill level.

A fascinating historical and personal reflection provided by Nicholas Bannan on three operas written for the young choristers of Canterbury Cathedral during the 1960s follows. Bannan's article, 'Signs of the times: the Canterbury children's operas of Alan Ridout', explores the potential relevance of these operas in the modern day and provides a timely reminder that 'children readily accept the medium of sung drama as a means of self-expression'.

Two articles offer different perspectives on listening to music. Vesna Svalina's article 'The impact of teachers' listening habits on how much listening activity is used in music lessons' reports on research in Croatian primary schools that maps the importance of listening in relation to other music activities. It explores the prevalence and importance that teachers place on listening in relation to singing, playing instruments, musical play and creativity, as well as considering the influence of the amount and type of music that teachers listen to in their leisure time. Koji Matsunobu, Robert Davidson and Khin Yee Lo's article 'The role of negative emotions in learning music: qualitative understanding of Australian undergraduate students' listening experience of unfamiliar music' follows this. This research explores the impact of developing music students' familiarity with music that they initially report as 'sounding unpleasant' and consider the impact on their motivation and cognitive reflection. It provides a welcome opportunity for us to consider how... 'individual processes of music learning and emotional reactions therefore also need to be understood within broader cultural conditions'.

Staying with higher education, Beth Pickard and Rosie Rushton's article 'Investigating the impact of volunteering with Melody Music Birmingham on the professional development and career pathways of Royal Birmingham Conservatoire students' reports on a partnership between these two organisations and the work they jointly facilitate in order to diversify the experiences within music education for students involved in the project. It explores the impact on these musicians, as well as their career trajectory, and considers how a project model that provides opportunities for musicians at this stage in their career to work alongside established tutors with children and adults with learning disabilities is 'viable, effective and necessary'. Stephen Tatlow's

article ‘Exploring issues in categorisation of higher music education courses through FOI surveys of gender demographics in UK higher education institutions’ considers gender demographics of six different types of courses as categorised by the author. It concludes with some suggestions about how the Higher Education Statistics Agency’s data collection could be adapted in order to address some of the issues emergent from the data analysis in this article.

In the final two articles, we return to music in the classroom and the importance of developing expertise and confidence of teachers in different ways. Reporting on research from New Zealand, ‘Developing teacher curriculum design expertise: using the CDC Model in the music classroom’ by Graham McPhail, Sally Tibbles and Mary Cornish, explores the impact of using the ‘Curriculum Design Coherence (CDC) Model’ with two middle school music teachers on a song writing unit with 10- to 12-year-old students. The article offers a unique perspective since it is co-authored with the teachers involved in the study. The conclusion reminds us of the need to be flexible with tools and models, pointing out that . . . ‘there is a danger, however, that in its idealised form, the model can appear like a template demanding obedience’. We stay in Australasia/Oceania for the final article – ‘Because I’m not musical’: A critical case study of music education training for pre-service generalist primary teachers in Australia’ by Christine Carroll and Joanne Harris. The research shared in this article sought to address the frequently reported long-standing challenges faced by beginner and early career generalist primary school teachers. It reports on the gains in self-esteem from this training programme and urges us to consider how ‘the power for technology to facilitate creative music-making activities integrating listening, composing and both live and digital performance skills offers a practical solution to enduring problems of inequity of access in school music education’. It also ponders the long-term impact of such interventions, something that has significant importance throughout much educational research and practice.

All of these articles show that thinking about music education and researching it in a variety of contexts are alive and well internationally. Long may this continue!

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