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Music in Beginning Teacher Classrooms: A Mismatch Between Policy, Philosophy, and Practice

Linda Webb
University of Canterbury, New Zealand

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Abstract

This paper identifies a range of positions and perspectives that impacted on New Zealand beginning primary (elementary) generalist teacher's preparedness to teach music in relation to: government policy, curriculum and Graduating Teacher Standards requirements; and teacher educators' and school principals' expectations of them. The complex web of interdependency and tension that existed between the research participants highlighted a mismatch between policy, philosophy and practice. Preparedness to teach music was significantly influenced by teachers' previous musical experiences; access to pedagogical knowledge and skill advancement during their training; guidance and modelling in schools. Notionally, access to music education for every child was valued, but this was often marginalised by government priorities around National Standards reporting in literacy and numeracy. Findings have the potential to advocate for a realistic professional learning, development and resourcing framework that matches every child's right in New Zealand, to music as part of a broad education.

Introduction: The Context

The starting point for this project (Webb, 2012) was initiated by previous research that examined *Growing the Expertise: The expectations of a new curriculum document. Music in Pre-Service Primary Teacher Education* (Webb, 2002). Prior to the year 2000, in New Zealand a stand-alone music curriculum provided significant detail and guidance for including music in classroom programmes. However, *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* document introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2000, presented music in a reduced format alongside visual art, dance and drama (Elley, 2004; Foley, Hong & Thwaites, 1999; Lee, Hill & Lee, 2004; Mansfield, 1999; MOE, 2000; Pitts, 2000).

Research completed in response to the 2000 curriculum document, echoed my 2002 findings which included issues with the lack of confidence, minimal skill levels and pedagogical content knowledge as symptoms of radically reduced teacher training hours (Beals, Hipkins, Cameron & Watson, 2003; Rohan, 2005). Internationally, National Reviews in Australia (Pascoe, Leong, MacCallum, et al. 2005; Australian Music Association, 2006) and the United States of America (Parsad & Coopersmith, 1999-2000 & 2009-2010), identified similar findings. Byres (2006) added that in her study, *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2000) was used selectively, if at all in schools, and the influence of school management over curriculum planning, assessment and programming significantly shaped classroom practice.

At the first UNESCO International Arts Education Conference held in Portugal in 2006, Cooper (2006) highlighted a mismatch between music education policy expectations, teacher education resourcing and practice, and the increasing dominance of literacy and numeracy, in lieu of creativity, as key international themes. An independent United Kingdom review by Hofkins & Northen (2009) reiterated these sentiments, and issued a strong warning that with the emphasis on national testing, resourcing across the whole curriculum was indeed narrowing. In the USA, Baker examined the policy implications of exempting students from compulsory music classes in favour of extra literacy and numeracy, and argued that for reporting purposes, achievement "must reflect all components of the curriculum to be valid" (Baker, 2011, p.1). Despite this evidence, *National Standards* (Chamberlain, 2010) in literacy and numeracy were introduced by the New Zealand Government in 2009.

Two years earlier in 2007, the situation was further compounded for New Zealand when the Ministry of Education introduced a single curriculum document, the current *New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2007). Under the two pages given to The Arts learning area, a shift in philosophy and a holistic approach to curriculum delivery requiring integration of multiple learning outcomes, was reflected in music being renamed as 'music - sound arts' (Burgon,

Hipkins & Hodgens, 2010; Verstappen, 2009). The rationale for this name change was based on the premise that it endorsed and celebrated the sound exploration aspect of music making rather than music teaching (the traditional Eurocentric approach), and gave a sense of broadening the subject, including linking 'music-sound arts' with dance and drama (the other performing arts). In the same year, the introduction of the *Graduating Teacher Standards* (Wilson, 2007) by the Education Council (prior to 2016 known as the New Zealand Teachers Council - NZTC)[1] added further complexity.

Methodology: Research Design

A qualitative framework was employed as it allowed the nature of the perspectives to be uncovered (Bresler & Stake, 1991; Glesne, 1999; Roulston, 2006), and suited the "uniquely contextualised relationships" (Schmidt, 2010, p.143) found in the education context which is "inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.7). Narrative inquiry was utilised to construct meaning from the particular experiences of beginning teachers and those involved in preparing, qualifying and employing them (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

The participants. The thirty participants were: six music educators representing the main university providers of teacher education in New Zealand; a government Education Council / NZTC representative; and twelve provisionally registered beginning teachers from the same public schools as the eleven principals. Purposive sampling was used to ensure representation of demographic contexts and characteristics across the Christchurch area, the main city in the South Island of New Zealand.

Ethics. The University of Canterbury ethical requirements were met, and as I had an established working relationship with many of the participants, I was very aware of switching out of my professional role to minimise bias. My trustworthiness and rigour as the researcher (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton; 2001), was essential to the credibility of the project.

Data collection

Interviews. Participants were involved in thirty minute semi-structured interviews using question guides with pre-planned prompts (Agee, 2009; Dilly, 2004). The perspectives explored included: information about the beginning teacher's musical background and teacher training experiences; the expectations of both the curriculum and Graduating Teacher

[1] The Education Council / NZTC monitor teacher education programmes and award registration to New Zealand teachers

Standards in relation to including 'music-sound arts' in classroom programmes; and, the extent to which these were put into practice. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts confirmed with the participants.

Artefacts. The data collection process was cyclical, and included previous New Zealand Arts research material (Beals et al., 2003; Bolstad, 2010 & 2011; Boyack, 2012; Buckton, 1993 & 1997; Byres, 2006; Cooper, 2006; Foley et al., 1999; Mansfield, 1999; Pirihi, 2002; Rohan, 2005; Sell, 2002; Wargent, 2009; Webb, 2002), government documents (MOE 2000, 2007 & 2011) and the continual addition of related literature. This was a critical part of remaining true to what I reported in my writing, as triangulation of evidence from multiple sources of data "puts single pieces of evidence into context" (Davies & Hill, 2009; Barrett & Mills, 2009).

Data Analysis. The interpretation of the interview transcripts involved an inductive data analysis process, which was "like a funnel - open at the top and more directed and specific at the bottom" (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2007), and played a pivotal role in discovering how the parts and relationships were inter-connected (Crotty, 1998).
Using emergent analytic coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), over- arching categories were created and used as a framework to present findings and shed light on the factors that influenced generalist beginning teacher's preparedness to teach 'music-sound arts.' *Musical Background, Modelling*, and the focus for this paper, *Policy- Philosophy -Practice* were the three key categories that emerged from the data, along with *dependency* and *tension* as two significant interweaving themes.

Findings and Discussion

It must be emphasised that the subheadings of Policy, Philosophy and Practice that follow, should not be interpreted as standalone findings as there were strong interrelationships between them.

Policy

From a government policy point of view, The *New Zealand Curriculum (*MOE, 2007*)* mandates that 'music-sound arts' be taught in all primary schools. This is reiterated in the Graduating Teacher Standards with an expectation that beginning teachers are prepared to teach every curriculum area. However, the majority of beginning teachers in this study did not feel competent or confident to teach music-sound arts in a school setting.
The expectation that the beginning teachers would be able to teach years one to eight 'music-sound arts', (levels 1-4 of the curriculum, children aged 5 – 12 years old) was based on the premise that the teacher education providers would have sufficiently prepared them to do so. The principals and music educators interviewed all agreed with the Education Council /

NZTC[2] participant that teacher preparation had indeed become less consistent with the "focus, funding and delivery [change] in the research environment of universities." The mismatch and tension that existed around this was further compounded by the fact that the university had given graduation approval to these beginning teachers as graduating students, even though the majority had not met the standard required to competently teach 'music-sound arts'.

The eleven principals interviewed concluded that given the current prescribed training model with less practical music making, and a lack of specialisation, the expectations for beginning teachers to teach 'music-sound arts' was unrealistic (Barker, 2008), and that "lots of teachers...lack the ability to deliver music", as "music is not an easy area to have that expertise". This was also confirmed in a music evaluation report by the Education Review Office (ERO, 2006)[3], and there was general agreement from the participants with Hofkins & Northen (2009) that it was time to "call in the specialists" to work alongside generalists.

Findings revealed that government mandates regarding the curriculum and Graduating Teacher Standards are interpreted and implemented at the management level of both the teacher education providers and schools to suit their own particular policies, philosophy, agenda and priorities.

Philosophy

Philosophically, access to 'music-sound arts' for every child was valued (Heimonen, 2006; Lehman, 1993; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008) by all participants, but in this study, philosophical beliefs about artistic endeavours being a critical component of a broad education, and what was best for students (Forrest & Watson, 2012), were largely overridden by Government, university and school leadership not prioritising the time and resources required for the practice of 'music – sound arts', and was contrary to the *New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2007) policy statements (Hipkins, Cowie, Boyd, Keown & McGee, 2011; MOE, 2011). There was a distinct difference and tension between personal philosophical beliefs and the professional requirements expected of the participants as political agendas had to be managed and implemented by both universities and schools. Within the university context, the competence and confidence level of graduating teachers to teach 'music-sound arts', was for the large majority, very low, and reflective of students' lack of experience and skills achieved prior to and during their teacher training. In schools, the dominance of government

[2] The Education Council / NZTC is also charged with the responsibility of checking that teacher training provider programmes, are aligned with the Graduating Teacher Standards, so that beginning teachers are eligible to qualify for provisional registration.

[3] ERO is the government agency that monitors and publicly reports the progress of the implementation of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) in schools (ERO, 2009 & 2010).

expectations around reporting National Standards, in literacy and numeracy, significantly marginalised the practice of 'music-sound arts' as being nonessential. The impact of management decisions about curriculum programming, timetabling and resourcing provision, ultimately influenced beginning teachers philosophical thinking, preparedness and actions in their classrooms (Boyack, 2012; Byres, 2006; Cooper, 2006; Day, 1999 cited in McCullough, 2005; Hofkins & Northen, 2009; Rohan, 2005; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008).

Philosophically most principals believed it was important for all staff to include 'music-sound arts' in their programme, but were more concerned that as first year practitioners dealing with "praxis shock" (Ballantyne, 2012; Ballantyne, Kerchner & Arostegui, 2012), that the beginning teachers established themselves in the teacher role (Cameron, Dingle & Brooking, 2007). Also in the process of selecting beginning teachers, music expertise was clearly not a priority with ten of the eleven principals choosing those with strengths in literacy and numeracy, followed by information and communication technology (ICT), sport, and Te Reo Maori (New Zealand's indigenous language) capability. Contrary to the principals beliefs, 'music-sound arts' appeared way down the list, and from the beginning teacher's perspective, only one believed that their musical ability featured as a contributing factor in selection.

Principals were concerned that the arts had been "shoved together in some ad-hoc method", and that philosophically the name change from 'music' to 'music-sound arts' in the 2007 curriculum document was open to a range of interpretations across different schools. Music educator participants had a range of views about this, with several finding it "a little posturing" while another thought it positive as it provided a more inclusive approach.

Practice

Even though curriculum requirements stated otherwise, six of the eleven principals interviewed believed that since the name change in 2007, 'music-sound arts' had been given even less priority and was not taught regularly even in their own school, while one music educator stated that this decline was intensified by "not having a stand- alone curriculum," and that this had "impacted hugely" on the practice of all of the arts (Buckton, 1993 & 1997).

The participants agreed that there was even less time for the arts post 2009, as the pressures for teacher education providers and schools to comply with the changing curriculum demands surrounding National Standards in literacy and numeracy (Barker, 2008; ERO, 2012; Poskitt, 2012) created a major time deficit. As a consequence, principals reported that beginning teachers arrived in schools as a literacy and numeracy specialist group rather than with developed generalist abilities, and needed significant support in order to confidently take a holistic approach to curriculum delivery.

In knowing what to teach, six of the twelve beginning teachers who had included 'music-sound arts' as part of their programme, said they depended heavily on access to at least one of the following: school programming policies, timetabling, school and syndicate planning, modelling and support by an expert, observing interchange with a specialist, access to school resources and the internet for guidance (Cowie, Gilmore, Hill & Smith, 2010; Forrest & Watson, 2012; Wargent, 2009; Boyd Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). However, there were only two beginning teachers who taught specific 'music-sound arts' lessons in their classroom, and three who stated they could read and play music. One felt competent because she had prior skills and knowledge and stated that "music is a strength so I am happy to teach it because I have previous experience and confidence". As the most prominent 'music-sound arts' activity, singing as part of an integrated curriculum approach, was the example four beginning teachers gave as their experience with 'music-sound arts' teaching, and this had been carried out with multiple classes in their syndicate team (Wargent, 2009; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008).

The majority of principals expected that 'music-sound arts' teaching support would come from the beginning teachers' syndicate team or via the schools' distributed leadership model, but in reality, only one out of the twelve beginning teachers felt they were fully supported by leadership with planning, budgeting and resourcing when they were preparing to teach 'music-sound arts' (ERO 2012; Hipkins et al., 2011). Given this situation, it was no surprise that beginning teachers saw 'music-sound arts' as a challenge to teach, but inspired by children's enthusiasm for music, three recognised they "definitely get a lot out of it*",* and therefore were "willing to give it a go sometime". However, most felt the brief arts section of the curriculum did not provide enough guidance for 'music-sound arts'*,* and they were not familiar with the content they needed to know. One of the six yet to teach 'music-sound arts', expressed "I have to do more research to feel confident to teach it", and two of the music educators suggested *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (MOE, 2000) document was very helpful for this purpose as it provided more detail.

In five of the eleven schools, 'music-sound arts' was timetabled, with one principal stating that this was "to make sure that it does happen, [and because] if a school has good structures and protocols in place the beginning teachers are going to be okay if they follow these". The beginning teacher in this school appreciated being given a weekly timetable slot because it actually happened, and was the only one who mentioned having a specific time commitment. Another beginning teacher agreed that they needed a specific day too, "so that it is not an option anymore".

Two others less keen, identified as having no musical skills, felt they had no choice because it was timetabled, but in fact had not prioritised it to date! In reality the principal's expectations differed to the beginning teacher's practice and did not acknowledge that their staff members might lack the competence, confidence and willingness to carry out what was timetabled

(Boyack, 2012; Hill, 2003; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008). A way around this for three other principals was to not require their beginning teachers to teach 'music-sound arts' as they employed a specialist who had "the skill level and understanding required" Another stated that, "if music is a need…we would subcontract a specialist to come in", but to do this schools relied on the parent body to raise extra funds, and in one financially challenged school, they were limited by both resourcing and finding a specialist who was prepared to travel to their rural location (Pirihi, 2002; Sell, 2002; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008).

Dependency and tension, the two significant themes that emerged from the data, are interwoven throughout this discussion as a consequence of the complexity and interdependency of the relationships between all of the participants in this study. The university based music educators, principals and beginning teachers in schools all mentioned varying levels of tension and frustration particularly in relation to their dependency on internal structures and programming decisions, and the decrease in allocated resources and time to teach 'music-sound arts' with the need to prioritise other government curriculum requirements.

The schools and universities (as training providers) were found to be dynamic and complex environments with many layers of detail and underlying tensions from both internal and external influences that were constantly changing.

Of particular concern to the beginning teachers was the limited training and opportunity to practice 'music-sound arts' in the school context while they were student teachers. Successful encounters with teaching 'music-sound arts' for two of the participants, largely depended on prior music skills and experience which gave them the confidence and competence to give it a go as a beginning teacher rather than any specific support from the school.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study as the research sample only represented a snapshot within one region of New Zealand at a time when daily life for the participants was still affected by the aftermath of the 2011 earthquakes. Further study might include national sampling.

Conclusion

Findings in this study highlighted that the abilities needed to meet curriculum requirements in 'music-sound arts' are complex and considerably problematic when there is dependency on the generalist teacher to deliver it. With the lower priority given to music as one of four arts, and the external political pressures of National Standards reporting, there appears to be no urgency for schools to offer 'music-sound arts', and as beginning teachers transition into the

school environment, they are particularly willing to be compliant with the expectations of the school (Cameron et al., 2007).

The tension and the gap created between policy and the teaching reality in a generalist classroom was highlighted by many participants. A mismatch was also expressed by individuals about the 'double bind' (Bresler, 1993) experienced between their own personal philosophy and professional priorities they were bound by in making decisions about the resourcing and teaching of 'music-sound arts' in their school or university programme.

Representing a range of personal and professional perspectives and contexts, the participants in this study highlighted substantial discrepancies between policy, philosophy and practice. The impact of this mismatch on the beginning teacher's preparedness to teach 'music-sound arts' in their classrooms was significant, and exacerbated by the large majority having little competence and confidence to do so. These findings have the potential to contribute to further research that establishes a case for the development and implementation of a professional learning and resourcing framework that provides music education to all children in New Zealand primary schools.

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About the Author

Linda Webb has had thirty seven years involvement with primary school education as a pre-service teacher education lecturer, music specialist and classroom generalists. Webb is current Chair, New Zealand Secondary Students Choir (NZSSC) Trust Board; MThNZ Council member; and past Music Education New Zealand Aotearoa (MENZA / formerly NZSME) Chair. In 2016, Webb is a full time PhD candidate at the University of Canterbury, in Christchurch New Zealand. Webb holds a BA (hons) 1st class 2012, University of Canterbury; B Mus & BA (Education) 1989, University of Auckland; and a Dip Tchg 1976, Hamilton Teachers College.

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