

Lessons from history: Provision for classroom music teaching in Victorian government primary schools – Implications for future policy formation

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Abstract

Despite recognition of the value of music in education, the policies of governments have not always been reflected in the provision for music teaching in schools. This article represents a retrospective analysis and review of government policy in relation to the provision of music teachers and teacher training in Australia, with a focus on the government school system in the State of Victoria. This analysis takes account of changing social influences and particularly economic circumstances, and identifies the lessons to be derived from past policies and practices that need to be considered in future policy formation.

Music was introduced to school education in Victoria during the 1850s. Over the following decades of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there were several oscillations in government policy that have failed to adequately address adequate provision for music in schools. Drawing on findings from government reports and commissions of inquiry over a period of 170 years, the evolution of music education policy is documented. The value of an historical perspective on issues such as educational policy enables us to gain an understanding of past deficiencies so that we can become more informed and impartial as decision-makers and therefore avoid making the same errors in the future.

Key words: historical perspective, provision for music teaching, school singing, generalist teachers, specialist teachers

Introduction

Numerous claims have been made over the centuries regarding the benefits of music in education but only during the past 50 years has empirical research – most recently in the area of cognitive neuroscience¹ – provided conclusive findings to support these claims. Despite this recognition, policies of governments have frequently not resulted in adequate provision for music teaching in schools. For example, the representative national peak music organisation in this country – Music Australia – maintained in 2017 that as few as 23% of government schools were able to provide their students with an effective music education. This contrasts with the private

school system where it is closer to 88% (Music Australia, n.d.).

This article focuses on the provision of music teachers in Victorian government primary schools and the related issue of music teacher training through a retrospective analysis and review of government policy over the past 170 years. This analysis will take account of relevant social and economic factors, and conclude by identifying the lessons to be learnt from past policies and practices that need to be considered in future policy formation.

Two aspects need to be clarified at the outset. Firstly, Victoria – like other Australian states and territories – has a binary system of school education comprising the government school sector, funded by the respective state and territory governments, and the independent school sector funded by parents' fees and grants from the national

¹ See, for example, Anita Collins, *The Music Advantage: How learning music helps your child's brain and wellbeing*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020.

government. Provision for music teaching in the government school sector has been problematic in comparison with that in the independent school sector, particularly at the primary level. Most government secondary schools make provision for classroom music teaching, albeit that it is often only available on a non-continuous and/or elective basis. In order to accommodate the five areas now comprising the arts curriculum – dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts – students may receive a semester of classroom music and then move to another art form. But the major problem historically has been, and continues to be, at the primary level in the government sector where the actual provision for students to receive classroom music teaching is frequently deficient. This is in marked contrast to independent schools where opportunities to participate in instrumental and choral music as well as to receive classroom music instruction through the primary years is generally well assured.

Secondly, of the various factors involved in ensuring that students receive an effective education in classroom music – one that is sequential, developmental and continuous – the provision of teachers with appropriate musical skills and knowledge is fundamental. This in turn raises another important issue – adequate training for primary teachers of classroom music. Other aspects, such as the music curriculum to be taught, opportunities for extra-curricular instrumental music and for participation in choral and instrumental ensembles would seem to be more easily accommodated if appropriately skilled teachers capable of implementing music programs are in place.

Policies established during the 19th Century

The subject of Music or Singing as it was more usually referred to during the 19th Century was introduced to schools in Victoria during the 1850s. Social conditions were such that colonial authorities recognised that children on the goldfields were being brought up in what

was described as an inherently degenerate society (see Stevens, 1981). Taking their lead from models in Britain, the colonial government decided to cater for both religious and secular interests by establishing a “dual boards” system of elementary education – a Denominational Schools Board for church schools and a Board of National Education for non-sectarian schools.² This system set a pattern that has continued to the present day; on the one hand, variously-termed government, public or state schools and, on the other, independent schools, which generally have a religious affiliation.

The influx of gold diggers, many of undesirable character, occurred with the discovery of gold in 1851. The Denominational Schools Board expressed the view in 1859 that “... children of the lower classes on the gold fields stand especially in need of the civilizing and elevating influence of music ...” (Stevens, 1978, p. 227). Given that ordinary class teachers generally lacked the necessary musical knowledge and skills and could at best only teach “singing by ear”, both boards appointed itinerant singing masters to provide specialist musical instruction in their schools. Singing masters’ salaries were initially paid from board funds but soon parents were expected to pay a special subject fee with the result that music became an extra-curricular and therefore optional subject in the school curriculum. But, by the end of the 1850s, the fee system was proving to be problematic. Singing had been included in the pupil-teacher system of teacher training with the hope that generalist classroom teachers could provide musical instruction. Predictably, this system did not work and, despite an ample supply of specialist singing masters, funding for specialist music teaching continued to be difficult so that, in 1862, school inspectors of Denominational Schools

² The Irish National System of Education was established in 1831 to administer state-funding of elementary schools based on Lancasterian methods of literary and moral instruction but with an avoidance of any proselytising within the curriculum, separate religious instruction being held outside school hours.

reported that only 30.7% of pupils were receiving musical instruction (Stevens, 1978, p. 229).

In 1862, the dual boards system was supplanted by a single education authority – the Board of Education or “Common Schools Board” as it was known – that funded both denominational and non-denominational schools. Due to the cost of employing itinerant singing masters, the new board decided to dispense with their services but, in response to a public outcry, allowed local school committees to engage singing masters under a fee scheme. Parents were charged a fee not exceeding one penny per week for a student to attend singing lessons which the board supplemented with an equal amount (Stevens, 1978, pp. 264-5). Singing was again effectively an extra-curricular and optional subject. Some singing masters continued to be employed in urban areas but they were now required to undergo an examination for a License to Teach Singing to ensure their competence. In rural areas, classroom teachers were encouraged to qualify for a Certificate of Competency in Music for which they could receive additional remuneration (Stevens, 1978, pp. 267-71).

The 1867 Higginbotham Royal Commission on Education recommended that singing should be taught as an ordinary subject of the school curriculum, free of any extra fees, by musically qualified classroom teachers who should be paid additional salary (Stevens, 1978, pp. 287-8). This arrangement proved largely ineffective because few generalist teachers had sufficient musical background to meet the certificate requirements and singing lessons, where offered, were dependent on itinerant singing masters being remunerated through parents’ fees. By 1871, the extent to which musical instruction was being provided in Common Schools was only 15.3% of the total enrolment (Stevens, 1978, p. 299).

There was yet another change in the administration of school education in Victoria in 1872 with the establishment of a Department of Public Instruction and the coming of “free, compulsory and secular” state education. Although singing was initially categorised as an extra-

curricular subject for which a fee of two pence per week was levied to parents, singing was introduced to the ‘Course of Free Instruction’ in 1875 (Stevens, 1978, p. 304). The subject was now taught by singing masters in more populous districts who were paid set salaries and by generalist class teachers who had qualified for the Certificate of Competency in Music who were paid on an hourly basis for providing musical instruction in rural areas (Stevens, 1978, pp. 304-5). By 1877, music was taught according to a prescribed syllabus that included a study of music theory and notation and practical experiences in unison- and part-singing in some 259 state schools (Stevens, 1978, p. 305).

In 1878, the first of several financial crises occurred and the Victorian government dismissed some 23 singing masters as part of its austerity measures. However, based on the recommendations from the 1877-8 Pearson Royal Commission of Inquiry and when economic conditions allowed, the Minister of the day re-employed the singing masters, but with only temporary appointments and on reduced salaries. Musically qualified classroom teachers, previously paid on hourly rates, were now paid an annual allowance of £10 for their extra duties in teaching music (Stevens, 1978, p. 308). The Minister also appointed a Special Instructor in Music responsible for supervising the teaching of music in state schools, a position that was later upgraded to Inspector of Music (Stevens, 1978, p. 309).

Both the Pearson Royal Commission and then the Roger-Templeton Commission in 1884 recommended that the extent and quality of music teaching in schools should be improved and, given the continuing high cost of employing itinerant singing masters, responsibility for music teaching should be transferred from specialist to generalist teachers. When departmental regulations were revised in 1890, it was mandated that singing should be taught to all classes by classroom teachers and that music should be included as a compulsory subject at all levels of teacher training (Stevens, 1978, p. 316). In his report, the Minister stated that “A certain knowledge of music will

in future be required of all persons desirous of qualifying themselves for the position of teacher ... It will no doubt be a long time before singing can be wholly taught by members of the ordinary staff: but the first step towards that desirable end has been taken" (Stevens, 1978, p. 316).

Ordinary classroom teachers had been encouraged to qualify to qualify for the License to Teaching Singing or the Certificate of Competency in Music and to then receive either additional salary or the right to charge fees to parents. Although classroom teachers were given the opportunity to attend special classes to prepare for these examinations, the system was largely ineffectual. The Minister of Public Instruction had previously reported in 1885 that "in music, the number of successful candidates] is absurdly small. And the explanation is not hard to find. The requirements are, in my opinion, much too high, especially in the sight singing and [music] dictation tests"

(Stevens, 1978, p. 342) which was borne out in the examination results over two decades (see Table 1).

Nevertheless, by 1892-93, there were forty-four itinerant singing masters as well as 149 musically qualified classroom teachers providing paid musical instruction to one-third of all state school pupils (Stevens, 1978, p. 376). The idea was, that having provided for all future classroom teachers to receive instruction in music as part of their teacher training at the newly-opened Melbourne [Teacher] Training College,³ music teaching would ultimately be transferred entirely to generalist classroom teachers.

With the onset of the most serious economic crisis to date – the 1890s depression – coming to a head in 1893, drastic cuts were made in all areas of government expenditure. Not the least of these

³ The Melbourne Training College was opened in Grattan Street in Carlton in 1888, providing a two-year course for the School Teacher's Certificate of Competency.

Year	Licence to Teach Singing			Certificate of Competency in Music		
	Number of Candidates	Candidates Passed Fully	Candidates Passed Partially	Number of Candidates	Candidates Passed Fully	Candidates Passed Partially
1879-80	417	16	33	-	-	-
1880-81	345	22	18	5	-	-
1881-82						
1882-83	156	9	13	4	-	2
1883-84	222	14	2	6	-	1
1884-85	173	14	4	5	-	1
1885-86	100	9	4	4	-	2
1886-87	100	21	6	5	-	2
1887-88	144	21	7	5	-	-
1888-89	136	27	5	5	-	2
1889-90	190	35	4	10	2	1
1890-91	172	46	11	10	2	1
1891-92	360	64	30	8	1	1
1892-93	269	59	6	8	-	-
1893-94	193	30	14	-	-	-
1894-95	14	1	4	-	-	-
1895-96	8	-	4	-	-	-
1896-97	17	-	13	-	-	-
1897-98	6	-	1	3	-	-
1898-99	9	-	2	5	1	3
1899-1900	8	1	4	-	-	-
1900-01	7	1	5	6	-	2
1901-02	7	3	3	2	1	1

Table 1: Results of Examinations for Specialist Music Teaching Qualifications, Victoria 1879/80 – 1901/2. (Stevens, 1978, p. 346)

were in education where, despite public protests, the salaries of singing masters (as well as drawing masters) were withdrawn and 21 full-time and 20 part-time singing masters were dismissed but allowed to continue teaching on a fee-charging basis. The Inspector of Music was also retrenched and payments to musically qualified classroom teachers ceased. In a report following a deputation of singing masters, the Minister stated "... [there is] an immense difference ... between singing and drawing and the three Rs [i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic]. The three Rs were a necessity of bread and butter in a civilised community and we must have our people educated. Singing and drawing were luxuries ... like a ship in heavy weather, we have to jettison cargo; it was a distinctly clear and unmistakable loss, but it must be done" (Stevens, 1978, p. 319). After nearly three decades of oscillating school music education policies under successive educational administrations, the government finally decided that, from an economic perspective, the teaching of singing should be transferred from specialist to generalist teachers.

The lack of musical competence among generalist primary teachers was therefore a major factor inhibiting the transfer of responsibility for music teaching from specialist to generalist teachers. Musical competence is, of course, an essential precondition to any successful transfer of music teaching from specialist to generalist teachers and so the lack of mandatory pre-service training and examinations for teacher trainees was the major obstacle to this scheme. By the end of the century, the employment of any new specialist music teachers in schools ceased as shown in Table 2. Despite the lack of these reductions in music teachers being accounted for in inspectors' reports, it appears that some specialist teachers were allowed to continue on a voluntary fee-charging basis.

Accordingly the number of students receiving musical instruction reported by school inspectors declined markedly as illustrated in Table 3.

At the close of the 19th century, Victorian government policy regarding the provision for music teaching in state schools, having oscillated

between specialist and generalist modes of delivery, finally settled on the use of generalist classroom teachers.

Developments during the 20th Century

In his 1902-3 Report, the Minister of Public Instruction re-affirmed the government's policy: "As the visiting teachers retire, their places will not be filled, hence, in time, instruction ... will be entirely free. It will of course be clearly understood that it is the recognized duty of the ordinary staff to give the necessary instruction in singing ... to children who do not attend the voluntary classes" (Stevens, 1978, p. 379). The net result was that the number of children taught by singing masters further declined to 3.4% of children attending government schools. Nevertheless there was still a high level of support for music in the curriculum from both departmental officials and from the community, especially given the perceived role of singing in promoting patriotic sentiment with the onset of the World War I in Europe. In 1915, the Inspector of Manual Training and Drawing, who a keen amateur musician, was given the additional responsibility for music which involved him in providing evening and Saturday classes in singing for generalist teachers (Stevens, 1978, p. 384).

However, the lack of musical competence among classroom teachers and also among school inspectors (who were responsible for ensuring that the school curriculum was being properly implemented) was a serious problem. In November 1920, J. Holman Code, a regular contributor to *The Australian Musical News*, drew attention to this deficiency:

It is safe to say that a large proportion of our State teachers are unfitted to teach elementary music either through lack of musical ability, knowledge or necessary training, or to a combination of these, and also that the departmental inspectors, with few exceptions, are similarly unfitted to examine the subject. What progress can we look for under such conditions? ... As long as music is regarded as "the Cinderella of subjects" and as

long as no serious effort is made to place it on a satisfactory basis, I see no hope for elementary school music in Victoria. (*The Australian Musical News*, November 1920, p. 122)

In 1923, the Education Department appointed a Supervisor of Music to oversee music in state schools and itinerant music teachers were again appointed, this time to teach in post-primary schools and to provide in-service training for generalist primary teachers (Stevens, 1978, p. 417). On-staff music teachers were appointed to post-primary schools from the 1940s and itinerant music specialists increasingly assumed responsibility for

teaching music in primary schools (Stevens, 1978, p. 418).

A Music Branch was established within what by then had been renamed the Victorian Department of Education and the number of staff appointed increased significantly during the 1970s so that by 1975 there were 107 music specialists in the Music Branch of whom 90 were field force staff – i.e. itinerant music teachers in both metropolitan and country primary schools as well as providers of in-service teacher education – and seventeen were Resource Centre staff (see Table 4). Resource Centre

Year	The Employment of Teachers of Singing in Schools by the Education Department		
	Number of Itinerant Singing Masters	Number of Qualified Resident Teachers	Total Number of Teachers Appointed as Teachers of Singing
1875-76	24	35	59
1876-77	-	-	63
1877-78	23	37	60
1878-79	28	14	42
1879-80	27	42	69
1880-81	29	49	78
1881-82	24	74	98
1882-83	24	86	110
1883-84	23	87	110
1884-85	27	87	114
1885-86	27	99	126
1886-87	28	101	129
1887-88	34	97	131
1888-89	34	103	137
1889-90	35	104	139
1890-91	39	127	166
1891-92	44	145	189
1892-93	44	149	193
1893-94	42	118	160
1894-95	0	0	0
1895-96	0	0	0
1896-97	0	0	0
1897-98	0	0	0
1898-99	0	0	0
1899-1900	0	0	0

Table 2: Provision of Music Teachers in Victorian State Schools 1875/76 – 1899/1900. (Stevens, 1978, p. 376)

services included music publications (production of songbooks and recordings of songs, recorder sheets, etc.), a printed materials library, a record library, a recording studio for use by staff and school student groups, and in-service education including instrumental music workshops. However, members of the Music Branch themselves recognised that the system of itinerant music teaching was having little effect in the schools:

The function of the field force as an itinerant teacher/advisory staff has contributed little towards an improvement in the planning and implementation of music in schools generally ...

On the whole ... classroom teachers have little confidence in their ability to develop or take part in any facets of music education, and will charge the sole responsibility for this curriculum area to the music specialist.

The music specialist on the other hand, unless stationed in one school, cannot hope to fulfil the needs of both teachers and children in the time usually available in any one school.

The result of this is that neither the classroom teacher, nor the specialist takes full responsibility for a music education programme and so, the present situation regarding music education remains. (Music Branch, 1976, pp. 52-53)

A major shift in policy took place in 1978 when the Music Branch was formally disbanded in order to decentralise educational provision to regional control, but with provision for music teachers in primary schools being substantially increased to 236 positions for music specialists in one or more primary schools as well as 50 positions for Music Advisors in each Inspectorate to promote music teaching by providing in-service training, generalist teacher support, curriculum planning, etc. (Stevens, 1978, pp. 419-20). In particular, the Department of Education offered a comprehensive music education subject for classroom teachers that included music theory and notation, guitar skills, music history and music teaching methods for departmental certificate qualifications as part of

Year	Average Total School Attendance	Average Attendance at Singing Classes	Percentage of Pupils Receiving Paid Instruction in Singing	Cost of Providing Instruction in Singing (£)
1874-75	104,375	36,000	34.5	-
1875-76	98,456	40,000	40.6	-
1876-77	102,515	40,000	39.0	-
1877-78	101,444	42,869	42.3	-
1878-79	111,278	32,444	29.2	-
1879-80	114,604	34,544	30.1	-
1880-81	115,160	34,308	29.8	-
1881-82	119,084	34,866	29.3	-
1882-83	116,414	34,006	28.8	7,201
1883-84	116,716	33,566	28.8	6,961
1884-85	118,764	32,746	27.6	7,308
1885-86	117,707	35,199	29.9	7,026
1886-87	121,870	34,212	28.1	7,512
1887-88	122,311	36,997	30.2	7,651
1888-89	127,734	36,940	28.9	8,131
1889-90	129,604	37,851	29.2	8,044
1890-91	132,814	39,913	30.0	8,576
1891-92	140,272	44,873	32.0	9,155
1892-93	141,382	46,753	33.1	9,224
1893-94	129,338	31,906	24.7	4,390
1897-98	140,463	16,083	11.4	-
1898-99	134,845	16,594	12.3	1,598
1899-1900	143,687	16,886	11.7	1,724

Table 3: Music Teaching in Victorian State Schools 1874/5 – 1899/1900. (Stevens, 1978, p. 373)

Year	Total Number of Active Staff
1969	57
1970	52
1971	66
1972	80
1973	84
1974	90
1975	107

Table 4: Music Branch Staff 1969-1975. (Music Branch 1976)

its in-service teacher education program. In some respects, this period represented a heyday for both recognising the need for and the actual provision of specialist staffing.

However, a major reversal of policy was recommended by an enquiry into music education with the Ray Committee of Review into Music Education in 1989. Having reported that only 30% of state primary schools had access to a music teacher – either to a teacher appointed to a “tagged” music position or to a generalist teacher designated by the school to take music classes, the Committee recommended that henceforth generalist classroom teachers should be responsible for providing music experiences in the remaining 70% of state primary schools in Victoria (Ray Report, 1989).

In the early 1990s, Victoria suffered a particularly severe economic recession and the state incurred a disproportionately large share of the nation’s financial problems. Victorian employment fell by 8.5% compared with a fall of 2.1% in the rest of Australia. The new-elected Kennett State Government, as part of its cost cutting measures, decided to reduce the size of the Department of Education’s central bureaucracy. In November of 1992, the government announced that 56 State Schools would be closed, 4,000 teaching positions would be abolished and 830 administrative staff were to be dismissed or redeployed (Lierse,

1998, p. 61). From a funding perspective, over 90% of the recurrent budget for schools was devolved to local school administrations with the flexibility to allocate funds according to local needs (Lierse, 1998, p. 78). This was the keystone of the government’s so-called *Schools of the Future* initiative which enabled principals and school councils to decide, among other aspects of school-based management, what specialist programs to offer in their schools. In the wake of these changes, a study of music in Victorian government secondary schools was undertaken by Anne Lierse during the mid 1990s (Lierse, 1997; 1998). Although focusing on secondary schools, Lierse reported that a large number of classroom music teachers had been declared “in excess” to their schools’ staffing needs, especially given that schools were forced to reduce the time allocated to subject areas due to what was becoming an overcrowded curriculum (Lierse, 1997, p. 12; 1998, pp. 62-63). This was much the same situation in primary schools where any remaining specialist teachers in tagged music positions were frequently redeployed to general classroom teaching. Again, Victorian government policy regarding the provision for music teaching in state schools had oscillated between specialist and generalist teachers being principally responsible for music teaching and the result being the same as at the close of the previous century.

Policy Directions in the 21st Century

A 2003 study undertaken into “Trends in School Music Education Provision in Australia” for the Music Council of Australia was unable to obtain any information regarding the provision of music in Victorian government primary schools due to the complete lack of any publically available statistical or other data (Stevens, 2003). However this report was one of the catalysts for the 2003-5 Australian Government National Review of School Music Education (NRSME). The report of this wide-ranging review, aptly sub-titled “Augmenting the Diminished”, included many recommendations for the improvement of music education and

specifically addressed the primary generalist-specialist dichotomy regarding provision of music in primary schools by stating in Recommendation 14 that “all primary schools [should] have access to specialist music teachers” (Australian Government, 2005, p. xxv). The report also focused on music teacher education with one of its Key Messages being:

Effective teacher education is essential. Hours for pre-service teacher education for music have contracted radically in the last ten years and do not adequately prepare generalist primary teachers for teaching music in schools. Urgent action is needed to address this problem. Pre-service teacher education for specialist primary, secondary, instrumental and vocal teachers needs to be reviewed and improved (Australian Government, 2005, p. vi)

The report also canvassed other means of providing music teaching services to schools such as outsourcing and made specific mention of The Song Room – a private provider of music education in Victoria – although it was pointed out that there was no Department of Education funding available for outsourcing, The Song Room’s operation being entirely dependent on philanthropic support (Australian Government, 2005, p. 50).

One of the immediate outcomes from the National Review was the convening of a National Music Workshop in Melbourne in August 2006 that proposed expanding pre-service teacher education courses to include practical music skills as well as music pedagogical skills with the objective of ultimately transforming primary school music through the provision of specialist music teachers in all schools (Australian Music Association, 2006, pp. 13-14).

Another outcome from the National Review was the establishment by the Australian Government of a Music Education Advisory Group (MEAG) for an initial two-year term from 2007.⁴ MEAG embarked on several projects to support music education including one that recognized the lack of data on the nature, content and extent of music in generalist primary teacher education. This project undertaken by Rachel Hocking during the latter

half of 2009 found that on average only 17 hours were allocated to the mandatory study of music in the primary teacher education programs surveyed. Moreover, mandatory music studies represented only 1.51% of the total credit points in these teacher training programs, pointing to a hugely underprepared teaching workforce unable to implement a meaningful music education program (Hocking, 2009, p. 100).

Meanwhile in Victoria, a music advocacy organisation – the School Music Action Group (sMAG) – convened a Victorian Music Workshop in 2007 with the objective of ensuring that the recommendations of the National Review were adopted and implemented throughout the State of Victoria. One of the key issues identified was “significant weaknesses in respect to the provision and quality of music in Australian primary schools. Fundamental to this issue is the question of students having access to specialist music teaching” (School Music Action Group, 2007, p. 16). The suggested actions relating to this issue included:

- Ensure Victorian primary schools have teachers who are skilled and competent in delivering music programs ...
- Over time, increase the number of specialist music teachers across all Victorian school systems.
- That the Victorian Institute of Teaching ... require all generalist primary teachers to demonstrate their musical skills and capabilities prior to teacher registration ...”
- Revising or extending pre-service [primary teacher] training (acknowledging the need for teachers to be more highly skilled in music).” (School Music Action Group, 2007, p. 16)

Largely as a result of lobbying by music education advocacy groups, the Education and Training Committee of the Victorian Parliament undertook an *Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools* whose report was tabled in November 2013.

⁴ MEAG was unfortunately not re-appointed for a second term by the then Minister of Education, Julia Gillard (see Stevens, R. S. (2011). Unfinished Business: The Music Education Advisory Group. *Australian Kodály Journal* (Online), 2011, pp. 47-49).

Despite the expectation that, under the then curriculum mandated for Victorian government schools, music would be taught to all students from their Foundation Year at school until Year 4, the Committee found that there was a lack of any official quantitative data to confirm or otherwise that this requirement was being realised (Education and Training Committee, 2013, p. 36). The only research related to this issue referred to in the Committee's report was a study undertaken by Jennifer Heinrich and completed in 2012. The findings from this study were that 38% of regional primary schools surveyed did not offer a specialist music program (Heinrich, 2012a, p. 141; 2012b, p. 52). One of the significant factors identified as accounting for this situation was the lack of adequate music studies in pre-service courses for generalist primary teachers and the decline of opportunities for specialisation in music in primary teacher education, particularly in rural areas. The overall situation was summarised by Heinrich as "If generalist pre-service primary teachers are not receiving adequate contact hours to prepare them for teaching the arts in schools, there would seem to be a strong case for the use of specialist teachers to take on the role" (Heinrich, 2012a, p. 62). Bearing this study in mind, the Education and Training Committee concluded that "A strong theme in the evidence to this Inquiry was the need to increase the number of specialist music teachers working in government primary schools." (Education and Training Committee, 2013, p. 88).

A School Music Education Statement produced by the then Music Council of Australia (now Music Australia) in August 2013 advocated support strategies to the Australian Government that included:

- increasing the number of specialist music teachers in primary and secondary schools ...
- ... supporting universities to upgrade education of general primary teachers to meet Australian Standards to teach Australia's curriculum in music.
- increasing professional development in music

education for existing primary school workforce (Music Council of Australia, 2013a).

Yet another national report entitled "Music to Our Ears" also produced in 2013 noted that Queensland and Tasmania and to a lesser extent South Australia and Western Australia were the only Australian states where specialist music teachers are employed in government primary schools. Queensland, for example, is able to provide music education in 87% of government primary schools through its employment of specialist teachers (Music Council of Australia, 2013b, p. 16). Considering the situation nation-wide, the report found that 63% of primary schools offered no classroom music and less than a quarter of government schools (primary and secondary) offered a program that would meet the standard of music education identified in the National Review, whereas over three quarters of independent schools were meeting this standard (Music Council of Australia, 2013b, p. 14).

The most recent report (2017) on the state of music education in Australia coordinated by Music Australia identified three major problems with the current provision of music education nationally:

- pre-service teacher training standards (the setting of which is a Commonwealth Government responsibility) do not adequately prepare teachers for teaching music in schools
- there are not enough teachers with skills and confidence to provide all students with the music learning opportunities that were intended by the Council of Australian Government Education Ministers
- music, as a subject and as a broader experience, is seen as a "nice to have" but not recognised as a core element in the learning and lives of young Australians (Music Australia, 2017, p. 10).

What are the lessons from history?

Despite a decline in historical research in music education over the past few decades, there is nevertheless considerable value in reflecting on the past in the formulation of future policy.

Perhaps one of the most powerful statements justifying the relevance of historical research to contemporary education comes from Richard Aldrich:

Whilst a knowledge of history cannot enable us to predict the future with any certainty, it provides invaluable data for choosing between different courses of action. Historical study provides an interaction with a much wider range of human experience than is possible simply by reference to the contemporary work. Those who deliberately ignore the mistakes of the past are most likely to repeat them. (Aldrich, 1996, p. 3)

Accordingly, there are lessons to be derived from the ebb and flow of Victorian government policy regarding provision of music teachers in government primary schools – essentially the dichotomy represented by generalist versus specialist modes of delivery – as well as the related issue of pre-service training of generalist primary teachers in music.

Despite acknowledgement of the value of music in primary education, limitations in the funding of specialist teachers have been, and continue to be, a major inhibitor to the successful delivery of primary classroom music programs. As we have seen, on almost every occasion that governments have faced a financial crisis, teachers of music (as well as those of other art forms) are the first to be dispensed with and responsibility shifted to generalist teachers who, more often than not, have neither the competence or confidence to implement a music program in any sequential and continuous way. Despite the nominal requirement that music should be taught as part of the mandated curriculum, the subject has effectively been relegated to an extra-curricular offering in many schools.

The second issue adversely effecting music teaching in government primary schools is the lack of adequate pre-service teacher training in music. One of the problems underpinning this situation is the very nature of music which requires far more prerequisite skills and knowledge than many other curriculum areas. The deficit that many, perhaps most, teacher education students have in their music backgrounds may be attributed the lack of music

in their own school education. This is particularly acute given the range of curriculum areas to be covered within a primary teacher education course – reflecting what is essentially an overcrowded school curriculum – and the allocation in terms of hours that would need to be devoted to music to remediate this situation. Moreover, the place of Music in the primary school curriculum has been eroded over time from being one of two art forms – Music and Visual Arts – to being one of five art forms – Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts – introduced in 1995 with *The Arts Framework: P-10* (Ministry of Education, Victoria, 1995). Since then, the time allocation for Music has effectively been reduced to accommodate the five-way split in what, since subsequent curricula, has constituted *The Arts*. Accordingly, there has been, and continues to be, a deficit in the provision of music studies in primary teacher education which has now has been perpetuated over several generations of primary teachers.

Victoria, like several other Australian jurisdictions, is effectively “caught between and rock and a hard place”. Generally inadequate provision of specialist music teachers together with inadequately-prepared generalist teachers together make successful implementation of the mandated music curriculum virtually impossible. The only viable remedy to this situation in the long term is for specialist delivery of music education with properly trained music educators to be made available in all primary schools. This scenario is not beyond the realm of possibility as demonstrated by the provision of more than 550 specialist music teachers in Queensland primary schools (Education and Training Committee, 2013, p. 92).⁵

How could such a policy reform be implemented in Victoria and other Australian states? One of the key factors in policy reform is the role of music advocates within as well as outside Departments of Education. In Queensland, a succession of Supervisors of Music

⁵ This information was provided to the Education and Training Committee by the Queensland Minister for Education in the Committee’s Submission (2013, p. 1)

or Music/Arts Curriculum Officers in place since the late 1970s has resulted in the system of specialist teachers in all government primary schools being advocated, adopted and maintained. Contrast this situation with that in Victoria where there had previously been positions for Inspectors and/or Supervisors of Music until these were phased out from the late 1970s. Aside from where Regional Coordinators of Instrumental Music and individual School Music Coordinators are in place, there has been no position for some decades for a state-wide music curriculum officer who could advocate for and implement policy reforms in the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

What is the best way forward?

Although not explicitly advocating the provision of specialist music teachers in all government primary schools, the key findings from the Education and Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria's 2013 inquiry represent some key recommendations for future action:

- Recommendation 7: Developing further education opportunities for primary classroom teachers to specialise in music education – That the Victorian Government works with universities to develop a postgraduate course for in-service primary classroom teachers to specialise in music education.
- Recommendation 8: Developing an optional course in music education for pre-service primary classroom teachers – That the Victorian Government works with universities to develop an optional music education course for pre-service primary classroom teachers and puts in place measures to attract students into the course.
- Recommendation 11: Targeting music professional learning opportunities to graduate primary classroom teachers – That the Victorian Government supports the provision of targeted music professional learning opportunities for graduate primary classroom teachers and supports them to attend.
- Recommendation 12: Increasing music professional learning opportunities in rural and regional Victoria – That the Victorian Government supports the provision of increased music professional learning opportunities for primary classroom teachers and specialist music teachers in rural and regional Victoria and supports teachers to attend. (Education and Training Committee, 2013, pp. xxv-xxvi)

Laudable as these recommendations are, the lack of a music advocate within the Department of Education and Training gives little confidence that these recommendations will be implemented and that there will be a major change in policy to ensure the appointment of specialist music teachers to all Victorian government primary schools.

The lessons from the history of music education at the primary school level in the government sector in Victoria are clear and equally apply to all Australian states with the notable exceptions of Queensland and Tasmania. Nevertheless, there has been an increased focus in Victoria, as in some other states, on the provision of instrumental music in primary and secondary schools through instrumental specialists as a way of providing students with a music education. However, this provision does not ensure that all children at primary school level will receive adequate music instruction at a developmental stage when music learning is most effective and provides the best foundation for life-long music learning. Despite some exemplary classroom music programs being implemented in Victorian primary schools, my overall contention is that the lessons from history of primary school music provision in this state need to be heeded – unless either specialist teachers are employed in Victorian government primary schools and/or the pre-service training of primary generalists is substantially improved, children within the government primary school sector will simply not receive the music education to which they are entitled.

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