**The Arts in Education and Education in the Arts**

**Part 4 – Making it happen! Making Music Together**

I asserted in Part 1 that the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) gives us the best opportunity we have for improving the quality of music education for all young people in England and that it requires us all to do two things: to challenge what is happening where provision is not good enough; and to support efforts that will lead to improvement. In Part 2 I proposed that there is a place for the ‘arts in education’ and for ‘education in the arts’ and that the two are often intertwined. I argued that we must be clear about what we are doing, how we augment provision in schools, and that we must not compromise quality or reduce expectations. In Part 3 I addressed the issue of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for professional educators (class teachers), professional artists and what I referred to as professional ‘musician/educators’.

In this last short paper I want to address briefly ‘making it happen’ and the importance making music together.

At the time of writing, the details of the curriculum review are still awaited. However, I would argue that, if we are enabling young people to learn through high quality music education, enabling them to make music together, learning to become better performers, listeners and composers and to make judgements about quality, we are likely to be able to meet any requirements placed upon us.

Looking beyond the narrow curriculum review, at its most creative, an educational experience can be a high quality experience; provide value for money; challenge, support and augment provision in schools; and provide continuing professional development. All that is required is a professional analysis of what is needed; a clear understanding of how each experience fits in to the short, medium and long term aims for young people’s music education; and on-going evaluation as to whether the desired outcomes are being met.

Much of the current focus and hub funding is on the four core requirements of the National Plan[[1]](#footnote-1). In this respect we can learn much from the phenomenon that is El Sistema. Young people can make music together from the earliest stages in an ensemble. A student does not have to achieve a degree of mastery on his or her instrument before being able to make music with others. This is important as many of the ‘value added’ benefits of music education come from making music with others in meaningful and worthwhile ensembles. Young people and adults work together helping each other. Making music regularly, with frequent performances, motivates and inspires young people. Progress is rapid – as long as the appropriate expectations, expertise and support are also in place. As Ofsted pointed out:[[2]](#footnote-2)

“**Pupils enjoy their musical experiences and make good progress as a result of high expectations for all – every child can make, and benefit from, music.** *Enjoyment and success starts from the earliest stages of musical learning. Singing is confident, and attention is given to correct posture and increasing control of intonation, expression, and diction. Instrumental techniques are accurate and secure; there is no need for beginners to be out of tune.”*

It is no accident that the National Plan refers to Whole Class ***Ensemble*** Tuition instead of Whole Class ***Instrumental*** Tuition. The intention is that young people learn in a realistic musical environment. If the whole class is approached as an ensemble, with smaller group ‘sectional’ rehearsals, all aimed at supporting a musical experience that has integrity, the outcome is more musical, relevant and valuable. With differentiated material and creatively constructed timetables, individual needs can also be met, whether for remedial purposes or for stretching the talented student. Young people learn music through playing an instrument and singing together with others: listening, performing, composing, improvising and evaluating. Regular input from a professional ‘musician/educator’ with both musical and educational expertise ‘augments’ and ‘supports’ the work that is the school’s responsibility and professional musicians can add inspiration and motivation.

Most effective practice involves class teachers learning alongside children; back up sessions during the week, led by class teachers and/or students; and regular performances to each other, the school and the local community. The experience also acts as valuable CPD for the class teacher as well as for the ‘musician/educator’. There is coherence between in and out of school provision, between input by class teachers, musician/educators, and professional musicians.

Again, Ofsted reported of the Sistema inspired ‘In Harmony’ programme[[3]](#footnote-3) in Liverpool:

*The quality of music teaching enjoyed by pupils in group lessons is outstanding. The consistency of approach, founded on strong principles that draw on a range of pedagogical and musical approaches, is commendable. Every opportunity is taken to immerse pupils in musical language, and not a minute is wasted. The ‘In Harmony’ teachers are excellent musicians and their expert modelling sets the standard for the technical and musical quality that pupils are expected to match. At the same time, tasks are sequenced thoughtfully and musically so that pupils are able to master new ideas in small steps. Pupils of all ages contribute creatively by suggesting ways to improve their work and by inventing new melodic and rhythmic patterns to perform[[4]](#footnote-4).*

Next week I am off to see El Sistema in action together with representatives from Sistema inspired projects in England[[5]](#footnote-5) so I hope to learn more about what we can adopt and adapt to an English context. Watch this space for further thoughts.

These four short papers have only scratched the surface of the massively complex issue of what is high quality music education to which we all aspire. The main purpose has been to raise questions, challenge some accepted norms and to argue for responsibility, accountability and for high quality. My experience to date has led me to the conclusion that there can be confusion over the arts in education and education in the arts. Both are valid and both are necessary for education, society and for the economy. But they are not the same.

Over time (by 2020?) a high quality music education could be available for all young people. Whether we achieve this will be determined by the decisions each and every one of us takes now.

1. NPME page 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ten Characteristics of Good and Outstanding Music Provision in Primary Schools [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. NPME paragraphs 47 to 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/134723> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Made possible by the charity IHSE [www.ihse.org.uk](http://www.ihse.org.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)