**‘The Reflective Teacher’**

Research, results and replicability. Pilots that lead to sustainable practice – or not. Process and product. How do we successfully address the challenges that face us in providing all young people with the highest quality music education? Will we take the opportunity to implement a step change this time around or will we allow yet another opportunity to be lost - possibly with disastrous consequences? All of these thoughts are buzzing around in my head as I reflect, travelling back to England, following attendance at a conference in Belgium entitled ‘The Reflective Teacher’.

I have argued elsewhere[[1]](#footnote-1) that this is a critical time for music education. The kind of music education future generations receive will be a direct consequence of the decisions we, in the music education profession, take now. We can blame politicians, decision makers and funders or we can take responsibility ourselves for what we do with the available resources and opportunities we do have.

What do we need to do? The evidence is there for all to see. We just need to use it – as appropriate – in our own circumstances!

Every child should have access to high quality music education at school. Schools are funded to provide this and heads have a professional responsibility to ensure their teachers are equipped to deliver the curriculum for which they are responsible. Yet Ofsted subject surveys repeatedly report only around one third of schools, primary and secondary, give their students the sort of music education all young people deserve. At primary school level too many general classroom teachers lack the confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding to help their children in music, and at the secondary school level too many music specialists are not giving their Key Stage 3 students a relevant, high quality experience.

The following responses, from three ‘survivors,’ who had a passion for music and still went on to become teachers, make my point. In response to the question: ‘**What do you consider to be the most important influences on your teaching?’** replies included: ‘remembering my own education and the determination that I would never be a **dull** or **unkind** teacher’; ‘class music lessons left those who didn’t learn an instrument outside school **bewildered** and **unenthused** and those who did **un-stimulated**, **unchallenged** and **bored’;** ‘my early music teaching was a **negative, dull** and an **undermining** experience’. These people had support from elsewhere that enabled their musical passion to survive. What about the thousands of children for whom music could transform their lives but who may never have the opportunity to find out?

Part of the vision behind Wider Opportunities (or whole class instrumental and vocal tuition), now deliberately renamed First Access (or Whole Class ***Ensemble*** Tuition), for reasons that are explained elsewhere, was intended to address these issues. So can we learn from where we went wrong as hubs spend the next £200m of public funds? If we don’t, given the current economic and political climate, the chances of further funding in future are slim indeed and the chances of some head teachers ceasing to offer music in their school at all is a real possibility.

Early this century a few music services piloted Wider Opportunities. Continuation rates of 70% to 100% were achieved. Ofsted reports and guidance papers provided exemplars of best practice. £6m was provided for local pilots for one year prior to £23m the following year to support local roll out. £40m was found to enable quality instruments to be purchased over a 4 year period as part of a £330m package to support the work of music services. The OU/Trinity won a £3m tender to provide CPD. Charging legislation was amended. Policy, guidance, training, resources were all put in place. There was the potential for a 3-way win! Children would all be able to access music through learning a musical instrument and singing; instrumental teachers would be able to learn more about meeting the needs of all children from the best practice of their class room colleagues; and classroom colleagues who lacked confidence in music would benefit by learning alongside the children week in and week out for a whole year under the tutorship of experts. Later, a fourth win would be possible as these children transferred to secondary school with levels of musical understanding, skill and knowledge that could only be dreamed of. Yet somehow, so much of this possible future has not been realised.

Of course, pilots, with enthusiastic and committed individuals who are up for the challenge are always more likely to succeed than when programmes are rolled out to everyone. But guidance was ignored. CPD opportunities were not accessed. Poor quality instruments were purchased. Decisions were not taken on musical or educational grounds. Teachers who were ill-equipped to offer a high quality musical experience were left to sink or swim on their own. Head teachers who offered poor class music opportunities were ‘rewarded’ by ‘free’ opportunities provided by music services or other organisations. It wasn’t the politicians or head teachers who were responsible for this. It was us, the music educational professionals.

Fortunately there were many successes too. These enabled us to secure protected funds for music through to 2015. Hubs now have the duty to challenge and support schools. Hubs can augment school provision and set professional standards of quality for all young people. Hubs are even encouraged to prioritise Continuing Professional Development, using ‘front line’ funds to ensure young people benefit from high quality teaching. Hubs can ensure that ultimately (the vision of the National Plan is for 2020, not 2015!) all young people have access to a high quality music education including first access to instrumental tuition; the ability to continue with affordable and accessible progression routes; together with ensemble and singing opportunities. Hubs are required to undertake a needs analysis and to work with their schools to prioritise activity. Hubs can help to remove the isolation of the lonely secondary school teacher. Hubs have the opportunity to pull together all public funds and the available expertise in their area, ensuring best value for money is secured and that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Ofsted is providing support with resources and through visits to schools.

Will we use the evidence, guidance and examples of the best and most successful to improve music education for all young people? My reflections have left me determined to help in whatever way I can. Where will your reflections leave you?

1. See blogs on The Last Chance Saloon and The Arts in Education, Education in the Arts part 1 [www.dickhallam.co.uk](http://www.dickhallam.co.uk) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)