

Practically speaking: a trio of concepts for encouraging music participation for all ages

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Abstract

This paper makes the case for a model for music making in school and in the wider community based on practice developed over more than a decade. Its basic organising feature is known as the *Music Outreach Principle* which developed from an alternative form of social-altruistic music participation focussed on encouraging engagement and the will to engage others. Two associated concepts have emerged from research and practice. *Common Artistry* refers to the widely accepted theory that human beings are, by nature, artistic and musical. *Selective Mutism for Singing* relates to the generalised fear of singing, a basic form of human musicianship no longer widely practised in general social interactions. These three concepts provide a model that is easily understood and a clear platform for its wide range of users to reflect on their own music making and the way in which that music making is encouraged, or otherwise, in society.

Keywords: practical model ; music making; music engagement

Introduction

This paper makes the case for a model for music making both in school and beyond based on practice developed over more than a decade. Its underlying organising feature is known as the Music Outreach Principle which emerged from social-altruistic music sharing. Application of this principle contributed to the development of two broader related concepts: Selective Mutism for Singing, and Common Artistry.

These concepts provide a non-threatening theory for non-music-specialists and specialists alike, creating a closer match between practice and philosophical underpinnings and helping to overcome the barriers between academics and practitioners¹. The approach did not begin with a well formed theoretical perspective; in fact it emerged through moving away from already established methodologies; nor did it take its cues from any particular educational philosophy². However, as the

practice evolved – taught, evaluated, and influenced by its many users of all ages – it has developed a model that enfranchises those who feel alienated from their musical roots while providing a means whereby those with musical training can reflect on how that training might help or hinder their own musicianship, and their ability to help others.

This practical model was developed in what is now known as the Music Engagement Program (MEP), a program of some 25 years standing, designed and developed in a university and funded by local government. It began as a small, elite training program in a public elementary school for potential young musicians based on the Kodaly Method. While a small number of highly skilled young musicians emerged from this model of the program, problems also became apparent, both for those highly skilled young musicians and for the many who were excluded from the program. Some of these problems, as noted below, could be seen to be more universally applicable rather than just relating to this particular program. At the same time the solution that emerged was not designed as a solution to any 'problem', in the first instance. The rationale given here has evolved over time as a series of concepts that may have broader applicability in both practical and practical spheres.

The basic position

The Music Engagement Program (MEP) offers a practical, philosophically-informed model of social music making that is now designed to overcome a range of problems that affect music making in Australia. Its basic position is that active music making is the most important goal of any music learning and that the *lack* of widespread active music making is the most important problem to overcome. The concepts brought together in this paper as a means of addressing these issues embed a range of related ideas:

1. The most important outcome for any form of music engagement or learning is active participation.
2. All humans are innately musical and want to participate.
3. We don't need to teach children to participate in music making; we simply need to avoid sabotaging their natural inclination to do so.

4. Lack of participation, fear of participation, concerns regarding 'quality', 'talent' and/or skill, are all socially constructed and can, therefore, be de-constructed.
5. Any skill development or learning that reduces the basic will to participate is not of value.
6. The cheapest and most convenient (although not exclusive) means of participation is singing.
7. All music participation should be voluntary.
8. An individual does not need to learn anything about music in order to engage in making music.
9. Placing music in a social context and encouraging participants to focus on helping others participate reinforces its social role and de-emphasises skill development and a 'talent' focus.
10. Increasing and maintaining participation provides ongoing opportunity for skill development as suits the needs and aspirations of each individual involved.

The problem

Despite the best efforts of music education advocates, countries such as Australia and the US still have low rates of engagement in active music making³. Even our best estimates of participatory music making can be seen to be less than adequate if we take into account the accepted wisdom that, special abilities notwithstanding, we are all supposed to be music makers, not just music consumers⁴.

There are a range of reasons put forward for the low rates of music making. The argument proposed here is based on a study of the relevant literature, coupled with experiences in the Music Engagement Program, including both the reports of its users and the observations of its practice. Three factors merge to bring about the disenfranchisement of the general population from active music making: first, there is the gradual decline of the 'scaffolding' that allows individuals to engage in music making at all sorts of different levels within society⁵; secondly, there is our increasing reliance on and awe of specialists who display extraordinary skills or 'talents'⁶; thirdly, there is the inclusion of music as part of the formal education process, ostensibly to support the development of

music skills but which may well contribute to the opposite⁷. The commitment to a model of skill development in music is possibly created by, and certainly maintained, through formal education which requires outcomes and assessment, and aids the perception of music as something to be studied at school, and discarded thereafter⁸.

The MEP model suggests that this music education paradigm is itself flawed, and actually contributes to a lack of *appropriate opportunity* for participatory music making that could contribute, in the first instance, to a lifelong pattern of engagement and, in the second instance, to the development of equally appropriate (for each individual) skills that support that engagement. In this model, the appropriateness of both engagement and skill development is decided by each individual and mediated through social, active music making that is voluntarily chosen by each participant.

The expert model of music making that is prevalent in our society creates a problem for the average citizen who believes him/herself to be less than competent either through lack of innate ability or lack of training or a combination of both. The person in the street, if they think about music making at all, may profess disinterest, lack of confidence or downright fear⁹. The lack of confidence of those charged with teaching our children music is documented, particularly when discussing generalist teachers¹⁰. Even professionals can suffer from quite severe anxiety – indeed, the great Pablo Casals believed it was *more* likely to be a problem for those at the top of their professions¹¹.

In academic literature the subject of Performance Anxiety is usually discussed in relation to professionals¹². Music Performance Anxiety is portrayed in the literature generally in two related ways: first, it is presented as being normal¹³; secondly, it is presented as being helpful, at least in its milder forms¹⁴. Discussion is usually to do with modifying behaviour, either through psychology or chemistry, to lower the degree of anxiety to so-called helpful levels.

One element that appears to be lacking from much literature on the subject is the questioning of the actual need for anxiety at all. Could we perhaps consider that music making, whether by

experts, novices, amateurs or a mixture of those with different skill levels, be enhanced and increased if there were less anxiety around it? Might we look at the ways in which we teach music to those of different ages, skill levels, and career aspirations to consider whether the anxiety in the music making is increased or decreased by our methods? And even if we can make a case for experts, or potential experts, feeling anxiety as a necessary concomitant of high level playing, does it follow we need to accept such a situation for the less musically exalted?

Perhaps we might reconsider the subject of anxiety like some other aspects of the traditional paradigm where, for example, it is perfectly acceptable for a student to be encouraged to practice when he doesn't want to, in order to help him develop skills he might need in the future. Even when not explicitly stated, this idea of rigour, of sometimes needing to push through problems to arrive at some higher and better place, is understood to be part of the music education paradigm¹⁵, often creating an 'identity crisis'¹⁶ for music education as it tries to meet the needs of the many and the needs of the few. The MEP presents a different viewpoint, one in which no skill development, no level of coercion, is worth the sacrifice of the *will to engage*. Anxiety that sabotages participation or turns participation into a trial to be endured, rather than a social engagement to be enjoyed, is seen similarly.

Through its social model of engagement, the MEP relies on three related concepts to summarise its position in a way that has shown to be helpful in re-engaging adults in active music making, and contributing to music making opportunities for children. They are: Common Artistry, Selective Mutism for Singing, and the Music Outreach Principle. They were developed in reverse order but are presented here in a way that builds an argument for an approach to overcoming lack of music making in our society.

Common Artistry

The term Common Artistry¹⁷ derives from working with adults, particularly teachers, who lack confidence in their music making because they believe themselves to be unmusical. As the name implies, Common Artistry means that artistry is common to and in all humans: it is a universal

attribute that may be more or less realised in each individual. This idea is based on evidence from academic literature and, to a certain extent, on popular media as well, although in both cases there is mixed information.¹⁸ On the one hand, we claim that artistic behaviour is normal human behaviour. On the other hand, our educational methods seem to suggest that artistic behaviour requires serious training and possibly special talent as well.

One may ask why the term Common Artistry? Since the term developed in relation to observation of a problem in music, particularly singing, why not Common Musicianship? Or, if the problem relates specifically to singing, why not Common Singing, or the like? The answer lies in the experience of working with adults afraid to sing. Usually an adult's opinion of his/her vocal ability has its roots in childhood. A child's belief in his internal ability to improve himself gradually mutates into a belief in the fixed nature of his skills¹⁹ – being a 'bad' singer becomes an unchangeable part of his identity. We cannot alter his belief about his singing voice by telling him he has a good voice. Trying to help individuals overcome their lack of belief in their musicianship or singing ability through, as is often the case, exercises designed to 'improve' one's ability to sing is part of what we label 'buy back' into the very problem we are trying to overcome.

Rather than try to 'fix' a voice that doesn't need fixing at all, we need to help each individual begin to understand that he is an artistic person in general, and that his artistry may be expressed in any number of ways. If singing holds particular fears, there are other ways of being artistically expressive. Indeed, each individual may already be, or see themselves to be, artistic in other ways. Linking that sense of artistry with the possibility of artistry in music builds on a strength rather than a weakness. If other forms of artistry are, for whatever reasons, less confronting than music, particularly singing, then starting with those forms is a step in the right direction.

Common Artistry, then, is designed to indicate that human beings are artistic in a range of ways including, but not limited to, musical ways. We cannot insist that every adult actively attempts to be musical and the more we might focus on such a goal, the less likely we are to achieve it. If, however, every adult can accept their basic artistic compulsion and behave artistically in some way,

any way, we are already having an impact on his/her view of him/herself, which might, in time, lead to musical behaviour as well. We use the term Common Artistry because it is designed to be less confronting to *all* our fears of artistic and creative behaviour.

Selective Mutism for Singing

The concept of Selective Mutism for Singing²⁰ is derived, as the name implies, from the recognised psychological condition Selective Mutism. An original definition of the latter – 'the child's speech and language abilities remain intact but are not used in particular circumstances for psychosocial reasons'²¹ – is altered to provide a related definition for the former – 'the individual's singing ability remains intact but is not used in particular circumstances for psychosocial reasons'²². One of the signs of SMS, as we are defining it, based on the evidence for adult participatory music making, particularly singing, is that it takes an opposite trajectory to SM. The latter, Selective Mutism, is considered to more prevalent in children²³ while the former, Selective Mutism for Singing, is more prevalent in adults²⁴. Both have in common, however, their situation in the broader field of anxiety disorders – in this regard, SMS may also be considered a form of Social Phobia like SM²⁵ where individuals will function in appropriate and normal ways except when placed in situations that give rise to the phobia²⁶.

Two important points emerge from the concept of SMS. First, it is easy to function as a 'normal' adult in Western society without ever having to be heard to sing. Secondly, it is perfectly possible that even those who consciously refuse to sing publicly, may inadvertently break into some sort of musical behaviour in private situations where they believe themselves to be alone. If we accept that Common Artistry represents a compulsion to behave in artistic ways, particularly musically, then it would not be surprising to find that no-one is completely mute in SMS. At the same time, cultural considerations suggest that no-one is completely free from it.

At the same time, it is possible to conceptualise Selective Mutism for Singing as having a range of possible 'levels', up to and including complete cessation of singing. The ultimate 'test' for SMS is the absence of any anxiety when singing alone in front of a room full of adults, since this scenario

appears to be the ultimate fear for most adults. While singing in groups is an excellent mechanism for group music making (and central to the Music Outreach Principle described below) it is possibly to be a fluent and enthusiastic choral singer and still harbour fear of having one's voice heard. Yet few five year olds have such a fear: indeed, the experience in the MEP is that even children who might suffer from Selective Mutism may be perfectly willing to sing alone. Within the concept of Common Artistry, having one's singing voice heard is considered important and as 'normal' as having one's spoken voice heard, not necessarily as a means of exhibiting skill but as a means of expressing one's full self in the world.

It may be argued that defining a 'condition' like SMS would feed into the fear problem, thus creating more of that problem, rather than relieving it. Experience suggests the opposite, particularly when the term is used in conjunction with the basic operating principle of the MEP, the Music Outreach Principle, discussed below. The problem of SMS is one that everyone can relate to – not just those who lack musical training. The competitive nature of music making, where level of skill is assessed and tested in exams and competitions, creates a hierarchy which can influence all types of music making, even those designed to be non-competitive. The concept of SMS provides a level playing field, particularly with regard to singing. The experience in the MEP is that accomplished musicians will admit to their discomfort with singing, even to the point of suggesting that playing an instrument allows them to avoid singing, particularly singing alone.

And if one were to ask what we do in order to solve SMS, the answer is simple: we just sing a song. If even that feels too difficult, we suggest that the singing is for someone else, using what the MEP calls the Music Outreach Principle.

The Music Outreach Principle

The Music Outreach Principle is a practical intent that can transform behaviour and lead to a re-casting of one's musical views resulting in a closer affinity between the 'talk' of our innate musicality and the practical 'walk' that does not always encourage the flowering of that musicality. It considers the social outward-directed nature of music making to be its most important

characteristic. Every music maker becomes a facilitator of the music making of others. The sentence used to describe this process, which can be understood by people of all ages is: 'I make music in order that you will make music, for the mutual benefit of all.'

The Music Outreach Principle is certainly built around the idea of participation, as opposed to listening, but does not preclude listening. It certainly focuses on the outward, altruistic sharing of music but is not limited to that domain. It does not necessarily encompass a full music curriculum although it certainly can. While it provides a non-musical reason for musical engagement, it does not do so a utilitarian sense (for example, in order to create civic-mindedness) although it has demonstrated a positive impact on 'at-risk' students. It is not performance-based although it can certainly be used to create impressive performance-like events.

The Music Outreach Principle taps into the social underpinnings of music making as a means of human bonding, but gives it an interpretation that offers a non-musical excuse to engage based on the will to help others, combining the benefits of music making²⁷ with the benefits of helping others²⁸. It caters for individual needs within a group model and also removes discrimination based on skill, age, ability, or disability. Rather than being *inclusive*, its very nature precludes any form of *exclusivity*.

Teachers respond particularly well to the Music Outreach Principle, possibly because they have entered into the teaching profession with an aspiration to help others. To suggest to a teacher that their engagement with music making, through the Music Outreach Principle, may help the children they teach avoid the very fear the teacher harbours in relation to singing, is a strong motivating factor.

At the same time, both children and other adults working with a teacher are motivated to help in return since the Music Outreach Principle is multi-directional: it does not just flow from teacher to student or from musical expert to novice. It combines two very human qualities: the desire to make music and the desire to help others. The 'help' includes, but is not limited to, helping others to make music. The music itself may offer 'help' of various sorts, but that help is not defined precisely. Just

as the impetus to make music is vested in each individual and cannot be enforced, the help given, and the effect of that help, is for each individual to decide for him/herself. Each individual looks to his/her intent and allows events to unfold from that perspective.

Putting it together

This trio of concepts, built on practical application, provides a context for musical behaviour that encourages active engagement. It is immaterial whether an individual believes he/she has the skill and or ability to engage in music. Rather than try to convince an individual that she is skilled, or try and give her the skill, we ask her to step away from her own beliefs about herself and her musicianship altogether. We ask her instead to act from the following perspective:

1. You are human therefore you are already musical (Common Artistry).
2. You may have some fear of, or lack of confidence in, making music, which is not uncommon, but unnecessary (Selective Mutism for Singing).
3. The best way to engage with music and overcome your own fears is through helping someone else (the Music Outreach Principle).
4. The help for self and for the other is a song.

The concept of Common Artistry declares that humans are all artistic and, therefore, all musical. While this basic fact might seem obvious to academics, it can come as a revelation to teachers and other adults, particularly in relation to music. The broad nature of the concept allows adults who feel disenfranchised from their artistic selves to imagine themselves as artists, in the first instance, and then specifically as musicians. Such imaginings are not problematic, of course, for children. For a child, there is no question of whether one is an artist and, therefore, a musician; in an appropriate environment, children simply behave as both artists and musicians as a matter of course.

If we can help an adult see that he is an artist already, by virtue of his humanity, then we can begin to suggest that he is also a musician. If he is already a musician, or has no problem seeing himself as such, we can suggest he is also a particular type of musician – a singer. We can then discuss the concept of Selective Mutism for Singing. Focussing on singing does not preclude or

belittle instrumental playing: it simply provides a cost-effective means by which everyone can immediately behave musically and, coincidentally, develop confidence and skills without requiring any equipment or particular highly skilled assistance.

This concept is useful precisely because, as noted above, it provides a 'level playing field' from which everyone can reconceptualise his/her relationship with self, music and other. The *non-musician* can understand his lack of music making not as a function of faulty genes but of either lack of opportunity or experiences that sabotaged the musical impulse even while attempting to encourage it. The *musician*, whether professional or amateur, might consider both the degree to which her own musicianship has been compromised by her training, while also considering the means by which she relates to the non-musician or the trainee musician. For every person the basic question is: what is my degree of SMS and how does it impact upon my musical relationship with self and others?

Finally the Music Outreach Principle suggests that the best way to utilise one's musicianship is through helping others to exercise theirs, both in order to allow more individuals to engage actively in music and to help them through the music, whether they choose to engage or not. Importantly the Music Outreach Principle revolves around individual choice: any sort of coercion is unlikely to produce a will to participate that can be sustained over the long-term. Everyone engaged in music making in this model helps provide appropriate music making opportunities to encourage maximum engagement on an on-going basis. There is no need for stress since the goal is not exhibition through performance. Continued enthusiastic participation provides a richer musical environment in which those with special interests can reach their desired potential while everyone benefits in a range of ways from higher levels of active engagement.

Philosophy in Context

The Music Engagement Program has developed a practice-led philosophy which requires constant examination and re-examination of the grounds for action in order to act. At the same time, it is possible to situate these ideas within the broader context of philosophical discussion

internationally. The MEP relies on both literature-based research and direct experience to frame a position that is concerned less with ultimate truth and more with pragmatic utility. The commentator who perhaps comes close to expressing this viewpoint in the North American context is Wayne Bowman²⁹ when he offers this framing pair of questions:

If this idea, this claim, this way of looking at music were valid, what might it imply for the kind of music-related practices in which I engage? What difference might it make for me, for how I conceive of and execute my various musical undertakings?'

We have attempted here to situate philosophical discussion within the international context but with reference to Australian output. It should be noted that Australia, while having cultural roots and points of congruence with both the UK and the USA, has not necessarily followed closely in the footsteps of either when it comes to music education philosophy and practice. For example, the debate over the philosophies of Reimer and Elliott, which has exercised significant influence in both the USA and parts of the UK (notably Ireland) has had relatively little impact on either philosophical discussion or practice in Australia. Indeed the most recent government supported review of Australian school music education³⁰ does not mention Elliott at all. It references Reimer solely with regard to the arguments about the value of music education and even then does not include any Reimer references in the bibliography, a curious oversight for such significant work³¹.

While Elvira Panaiotidi might argue that the self-evident status of the philosophy of music education 'vanishes beyond the border of North America'³² there is some discussion of North American philosophical positions in Australia. Susan Stevens, for example, developed a potential philosophical approach for Australia based on the work of Dewey and Elliott, although this theorising is rare and appears to have had little impact on practice³³ in contrast with the impact of, for example, Reimer in the USA³⁴. Stevens' interpretation of the Deweyan philosophy as 'a conscious inquiry into experience'³⁵ which 'should cause change and should have consequences in individual lives and in society'³⁶ aligns with the MEP approach. Bowman is a more recent proponent of a 'philosophy of doing, of experimentation'³⁷ which contrasts with those philosophers who hold that philosophy is not a route to concrete education solutions³⁸ or that it cannot or should

not affect 'lived experience'³⁹. For the MEP, all theorising is related to practice since our experience suggests this is the only sure way to reach those who are *doing*.

Stevens' definition of Dewey's philosophy as an approach 'rooted in common sense'⁴⁰ would also seem to align with the MEP approach but the idea of 'common sense' is one that needs to be carefully reflected upon within music education. Bowman points out that common sense in music – the 'common sense assumption or assertion'⁴¹ – can be part of the problem. 'Common sense' in music may include what Sloboda et al call the 'folk mythology' of genetically endowed talent⁴², which is still a prevalent view amongst the non-expert, regardless of expert comment on the subject.

In point of fact, the MEP philosophy has an affinity with more general education philosophy as represented in the work of Neil Postman and his two seminal works *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*⁴³ and *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*⁴⁴. In brief, Postman suggested in the earlier work that teachers should attempt to subvert those aspects of culture that were unhelpful and unexamined, while, in the latter work, he suggested the opposite: that teachers should help to conserve those aspects of learning and culture that are swept away too precipitously by change. The unique positioning of the MEP between three institutions – a university, a government arts portfolio and a department of education – has allowed it to experiment with more radical change and still preserve those elements of culture that might otherwise be lost. Indeed, it could be argued that precisely by subverting some aspects of modern music education, it has had success in preserving the very elements that many music educators would consider most in danger of being lost, including the actual engagement with music which is surely one of the aims of music education.

Let us consider further philosophical points of congruence or otherwise in relation to the ten points discussed above.

1. The most important outcome for any form of music engagement or learning is active participation.

Point 1, above, would seem to put the MEP firmly in the camp of one of the 'titans'⁴⁵ of music education philosophy, David Elliott. Heneghan, in his analysis of philosophical differences between

those 'titans' Elliott and Reimer, suggests that 'The issue of performance in school education is at the heart of the differences in outlook between Bennet Reimer and David Elliott.'⁴⁶ The aim of the MEP is, however, not to enter a camp at all since it does not subscribe to the view that there must be 'a single philosophy and a unitary statement of purpose'⁴⁷ for music education. 'Active participation' is not a synonym for 'performance' *per se*. In this respect, the MEP subverts the focus on performance, which is seen to be, and often expected to be, at the heart of music education and music making⁴⁸ but also subverts the trend in modern music making that excludes the vast majority, particularly once formal schooling ends. More particularly, what the MEP subverts is the idea of *elite* performance as the only acceptable public music making, and attempts to conserve, in Postman's terms, communal and social music making as part of an active artistic society. A focus on active doing does not belittle the importance of listening; it is simply that the doing requires conserving since there is so much less of it. In any case, the twin propositions that active participation is compulsively human and that fear is engendered by much current provision, are less about 'proof' and more about usefulness in terms of promoting more engagement, which is seriously lacking particularly in Australia.

2. All humans are innately musical and want to participate.

It is difficult to find any philosophical position on music education that does not include the idea of general human musicality and the rights of every individual, particularly children, to access music education. Our experience suggests that while many non-musicians are prepared to accept the innate musicality of all humans, they are also prepared to make an exception for self. Expert conversations about degrees of genetic talent remain just that – experts talking to other experts – and do not appear to influence the general public who tend to believe that some people are more musical than others⁴⁹. Rather than attempt to convince an adult that he/she is indeed musical we ask him/her to consider what affect their view of self may have. If you are not musical, then you are accepting a position that says others are not musical, including the children whom you teach or with whom you interact. What does this belief mean for those interactions? Might the adult lack of active

music making help sabotage a child's engagement – if I, as an adult participate, might I help give the child a message that this is what adults do?

3. We don't need to teach children to participate in music making; we simply need to avoid sabotaging their natural inclination to do so.

There is little argument with the democratic rights of children to receive an education that includes music; it is our fulfilment of that obligation that is often the cause of the problem: first, because we embed the music within education, with all that that implies, and, secondly, because we appear to place more importance on the rights of the child *when* a child, rather than his/her rights throughout life. Our point here is that it is *humans* who are musical and who want to participate, not just human children.

In the MEP view, there are many elements that can simply be put to one side, and arguments about genetics are one of those elements. Dogmatic belief in genetic music endowments is one way in which engagement can be sabotaged. The best way to help *everyone's* genetic endowment is through providing an enriched environment through which specific interest and skills might emerge and be offered further support. This enriched environment is surely the most important goal of our public education.

4. Lack of participation, fear of participation, concerns regarding 'quality', 'talent' and/or skill, are all socially constructed and can, therefore, be de-constructed.

The idea that any aspect of an individual's musical self-concept may be socially constructed or imposed can appear as a revelation to the non-musician. Deconstructing western ideas about music making *as a means of promoting* engagement is not widely discussed in the literature, possibly because experts are focussed on ways of increasing and improving training rather than un-training. We are again interested here not so much in an absolute truth but a position that allows both musicians and non-musicians to re-think their habitual position on engagement for self and other.

5. Any skill development or learning that reduces the basic will to participate is not of value.

Despite much discussion (amongst experts) about the need for more music education, its

importance, myriad attempts to design different approaches, and the oft discussed problems with current provisions or lack of them, the idea that we should reflect on skill development in light of the degree to which each individual is encouraged to participate or otherwise is rarely discussed. It can, of course, be argued that active participation is not the only goal of music education but we would surely agree that *stopping* active participation is not the goal either. Postman's ideas can be seen to relate here too. The basic goal of school-based music may be explained as a laudable wish to conserve that which is less predominant in our society – music learning through enculturation. On the other hand, school music becomes part of assessable school content. Perhaps if we subvert this tendency and encourage active participation, rather than aim for improved standards, we will end by conserving more of the behaviour we are seeking.

The vexed question of standards can be seen to subvert much good intent in music education. McPherson demonstrates this point when he calls for a 'philosophy of action' where the goal is 'a shared vision aimed at raising standards across all facets of music education in Australia.'⁵⁰ Even that champion of 'musicking', Christopher Small, finds it hard to discuss the idea of wider, social music making without admitting that 'standards' might be lowered⁵¹. In Australia and the UK, this idea of a mythical standard has been used as an excuse to impose an extraordinarily influential extra-curricular exam system, the original purpose of which was purely economic, designed to help fund music institutions in the UK⁵².

This idea is perhaps the most radical and difficult for the public education system to embrace, thereby showing yet another advantage of the MEP's positioning outside of any assessment regime, but with the ability to offer solutions within that regime. Stevens' interpretation of Dewey for the Australian context is again relevant here when she discusses the idea of methods which are 'evaluated instrumentally in terms of the ends that they promote'.⁵³

6. The cheapest and most convenient (although not exclusive) means of participation is singing.

This proposition has sometimes been criticised as prioritising singing over instrumental playing. Prioritising singing is not an end point for musical development for society at large, but simply a

starting point. As West has noted elsewhere⁵⁴ aiming to ensure full provision of musical opportunity for every child can be like designing five course banquets for the starving. A song, sung without accompaniment, is the musical equivalent of the bowl of rice.⁵⁵

7. All music participation should be voluntary.

It is difficult to find any writers or any philosophical position that unequivocally supports the rights of any individual – child or adult – to a completely voluntary music engagement. Dewey, according to Stevens, was certainly concerned with allowing children some leadership in their learning. She writes, 'Discussion of the interests of the child at this level brings the discussion into grey areas, for young children who are not aware of the extent of knowledge within a discipline, cannot readily define their interests. How to handle situations where need and desire are at variance or when interests are not easily definable, is an area not easily solved within Deweyan theory.'⁵⁶ Indeed one paper discussing the music education at the Dewey school paints a picture of music education that does not demonstrate much difference from current practice⁵⁷.

Stevens also discusses Deardon who says that the task of the educator is 'to find the right balance between pressure and permissiveness, between freedom and authority, self-expression and submission to disciplines, which will enable each child to find the best in himself.'⁵⁸ This quote is somewhat chilling, with its talk of 'pressure and permissiveness' since pressure, or 'support' is such a central feature of much music education. It also gives a reason for this pressure which is to enable 'the child to find the best in himself.' Given the paucity of much music provision, advocates see it as a duty to provide a full, systematic music education as would be acceptable in other disciplines. However, if one carries the voluntary nature of music making to its conclusion, the choice of each individual both to engage and disengage is paramount. Part of the teacher's role is to ensure on-going engagement, rather than disengagement.

There are two crucial points that have emerged from the MEP practice in this regard. First, and with reference to Postman's ideas of subversion and conversion we can see the school system as helping with the idea of on-going participation by the very nature that also currently acts to prevent

it. Children have no choice about being in a classroom. They cannot necessarily choose not to attend a music class since duty-of-care demands that they are protected while at school with a teacher in attendance. Choice, then, might mean choice to engage or otherwise with the classroom music activities, not a choice to absent oneself. The MEP subverts the systemic pressure to engage but also can act to subvert the child's previous experience which might encourage him to disengage. If he is in a classroom the MEP philosophy says that his natural will to engage, given the right environment, will eventually burst forth – it is his own innate compulsion that will triumph, not the will of the authority figure.

Secondly, if a teacher is able to subvert her own inclination to insist on involvement and allow any child to disengage at any time, she is also in a position to lead strongly as well, since her strong leadership carries with it the understanding that she does not have to be 'obeyed.' Her own musical likes and dislikes, her own suggestions about content, carry weight as well as each child's. Thus the problem noted by Stevens, above, in relation to the Deweyan philosophy is overcome.

8. An individual does not need to learn anything about music in order to engage in making music.

It is difficult to find writers who make such a statement because not only is learning considered a necessary part of education but some types of musical learning are considered necessary for the making of music. The point is not that learning will not or should not occur, but that it is not necessary to mandate particular types of learning, or particular content in order to allow any individual to engage. Our experience is that given the right environment, any individual, child or adult, will seek appropriate support from others, particularly others who they perceive to have skills they desire. If the intent is to encourage engagement then it is only necessary to trust that engagement will emerge and increase.

9. Placing music in a social context and encouraging participants to focus on helping others participate reinforces its social role and de-emphasises skill development and a 'talent' focus.

A significant part of the long-term debate around music education centres on the dual propositions of its intrinsic and extrinsic value. Reimer's intrinsic view was, in part, a reaction to the

former extrinsic focus, particularly on developing good citizens through music making⁵⁹.

Temmerman claims that 'school music in Australia is overwhelmingly extrinsic in orientation'⁶⁰ which is understandable if the North American debates have not strongly influenced our development. At the same time Daugherty suggests that the 'cognitive personalism' that characterises both Reimer and Elliott's philosophies does not specifically focus on the social⁶¹.

The MEP, as with other debates of this nature, takes a middle view. There is no reason to suppose that music cannot have both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. One could well argue that prioritising musical skill development, be it improvement of doing or listening, is not necessarily the most intrinsic focus. The use of music in a social context is not designed specifically to 'improve' either the social behaviour or the musicianship of the participants. It is simply tapping into a dimension of music that many writers understand to be part of its adaptive value for humans. At the same time, the extrinsic, extra-musical dimension offered by this focus has proved enormously beneficial in encouraging engagement precisely because it takes the focus *off* the quality and/or presentational nature of the music making, an advantage for those that believe they are not qualified to 'present' their personal music making to others.

While the MEP is not specifically aiming to use music to improve the citizenry's social behaviour (any more than its musical competency) the views of the social commentator Robert Jensen are relevant here when he attests that 'privilege undermines the capacity for empathy⁶²,' in privileged countries like Australia. One often-observed feature of the MEP outreach approach is the degree to which it appears to encourage exactly that emotional dimension in both children and adults. Indeed teachers often comment on the degree to which a difficult child, not to mention classes in general, appear to improve in social behaviour as a result of outreach participation, particularly where it involves leaving the school grounds. There have been no reported cases of inappropriate behaviour from children on outreach excursions in the entire history of the Program to date, involving at least 500 excursions.⁶³

It is important for teachers to understand, with reference to the Dewey quote above, that the

purpose of the socio-musical interactions are no more about prioritising improved behaviour than they are about prioritising improved musical competency. These results, in the MEP philosophy, will inevitably arise, and do not require special attention in and of themselves. Indeed, they may well be less obvious if prioritised, just as the priority to train musical competency does not result in mass musical competency. The idea of offering altruistic possibilities for music making helps counteract the individualism inherent in the Reimer/Elliott approach, while the central focus on individual choice ensures that individual needs are still met and, paradoxically, still prioritised as well. Perhaps the strongest sign that the social approach adopted in the MEP is tapping into innate human compulsions to make music and to be socially connected while doing so, is that the vast majority of children offered the opportunity to undertake outreach do so, and continue to do so, voluntarily and often in their break times (that is, not just in order to 'skip class'). Equally significant is that, despite parental attendance at outreach visits and occasional problems with visits (caused by erratic behaviour of seniors with dementia), there has never been one parental complaint lodged about outreach visits.

10. Increasing and maintaining participation provides ongoing opportunity for skill development as suits the needs and aspirations of each individual involved.

It seems like the proverbial 'no-brainer' to state that cessation of musical activity, which occurs for the vast majority of adults, puts an end to any opportunity for further skill development in music. Despite the arguments put forward for the intrinsic value of music education, much research cited by advocacy groups revolves around the value of music making for other subject areas⁶⁴. It appears that this factor is of more importance than long-term music making, even though there are now increasing numbers of organisations such as 'Making Music' in the UK that are dedicated to, in that organisation's words, 'supporting and championing voluntary music.'⁶⁵ The MEP philosophy prioritises on-going music *making* because this activity always allows for the possibility of further benefit to each individual as suits his/her needs, whether that benefit is social, emotional, musical or cognitive or a combination of all these things. In the case of the MEP, this position is neither

curricular, nor extra-curricular, but always both.

The Practice

How might music education look within this practice-led philosophical model? Since the philosophy has emerged from the practice, there is a myriad of examples to draw on to describe practice. Indeed, there is no one picture to be drawn of the MEP in practice because the practice continues to grow and develop, facilitated by its many users who often ask and answer their own questions with regard to how it might work in their particular context. These examples of practice are used as case studies and critical incidents in the expanding qualitative section of the MEP research paradigm. The MEP has an underlying intent to increase active musical participation for everyone on the basis that making music is naturally human and of benefit to us as individuals and as communities. Exactly how that occurs can vary enormously and the philosophical underpinnings have proved to be both useful in determining practice as well as flexible in adjusting practice.

The MEP usually becomes established in a school because a teacher undertakes a short extra-curricular training course in the basics of the program and returns to her school to begin singing some of the standard MEP repertoire. She may have been introduced to the idea through a teacher friend at another school, or through an *ad hoc* visit by a member of the MEP team who runs a demonstration session with one or several classes, sometimes the whole school, which usually results in several songs being learned and sung enthusiastically.

The intent of using one's own music making to encourage the music making of others is a simple but powerful incentive for adults to engage, but that does not mean that the more public forms of 'outreach' are immediately undertaken. A teacher who will begin music making with her own class, or increase her amount of music making after an MEP course, will not necessarily immediately embark on an outreach visit to a care facility. However she might consider 'outreach' to the class next door, or have her class reach out to the whole school by teaching a song at an assembly. This type of shared activity is not in itself unusual in schools, it is the nature of the intent that makes it unusual.

Likewise, the 'classic' outreach visit, to an off-campus nursing home, may not, at first glance, appear different from many school excursions. It is not unusual for classes to visit senior citizens in care for a social visit or to perform musical items. The Music Outreach Principle reframes these visits combining the social and musical but without the performance or presentational element as the key component. Children do not stand as a choir but mingle freely in small groups or individually with residents in attendance. They make close personal contact through singing and conversation, singing songs known by the residents and encouraging actual participation through both singing and movement insofar as each resident is able. The children will often run the outreach visit, deciding on song repertoire and the order of songs, responding to residents' suggestions and asking for teacher support only as necessary. Teachers simply join in with the students. There may be instrumental accompaniment or unaccompanied singing, or a combination of both.

Since there is no mandated activity within the MEP, the 'spread' of the Program through any environment, school or otherwise, proceeds in its own way and at its own speed. Each school will develop as suits that environment and developments will alter depending on personnel. The MEP staff provides support for each school as requested.

Staff and student movement through the system has provided an interesting insight into the organic development of the MEP. If a teacher moves school, the move may result in less music making at her original school but more and expanded music making at her next school; or her original school may either have other trained teachers, or seek to 'fill the gap' with an MEP trained teacher in order to ensure continuity. Teachers moving within the system may seek out an 'MEP' school, or choose to go to a 'non-MEP' school in order to establish the program in a new context. A child moving to a new school, with all its attendant difficulties in re-establishing relationships, can be supported if both schools are related to the MEP. The child will arrive at a school which already has repertoire he knows and is undertaking musical activities he recognises. Since the aim of the music making is to encourage and support social engagement, other students are primed to help him integrate into the school culture.

It is important to note that the MEP philosophy allows for music making within and beyond the school gate. The MEP organises events that include multiple schools, other social and musical organisations, the general public, or a combination of all of these, where the intent is to include everyone, as suits each individual, in the music making activity. Schools, with their community focus, are an important part of this outward directed activity and many schools embrace the opportunity to increase their reach into their local communities beyond the student/parent body.

One important aspect of the MEP model is the idea of the individual choice of each participant. At the simplest level, this idea of choice has led to the development of a core song repertoire developed in consultation with students, teachers and community members over a decade. All participants, including children, choose whether to sing and what to sing. Obviously a class has to reach agreement on what to sing and the core repertoire, known as the 'Seventy Over Seven' series (10 songs for each year of elementary school) has developed as part of student decision making, as well as helping in the on-going process. Within the series, there are particular songs that are known to be popular with, for example, older boys who have not previously engaged in singing. The songs are not mandated but serve as an introduction from which each class and each school can extend the repertoire to suit their own situation. The placement of the MEP outside the school system assists by allowing extra support personnel to come into a school environment and demonstrate to a teacher exactly how their own students will respond to singing within this model. Demonstrating how to both offer and mediate choices within the class is another demonstrable element of the philosophy in practice.

At the other end of the spectrum in a school where the Program is firmly embedded, choice operates to help each individual develop skills as they wish. For example, music offered to students incorporates a range of different levels. Figure 1 below offers one example of a piece offered to Year 6 students (11-12 years of age) at a school with the MEP embedded. Choice for students involved whether they sang at all, whether they helped work out the melody through sight singing, how they chose to sight sing (solfa, note names, lyrics), how the parlendo rhythm might 'go', how to

check the result instrumentally, what other part they might sing, how those parts were to be learned, how the end result would be put together and whether it would be sung and/or taught to other children in the school.

The idea of choice obviously extends to teachers as well. Choice implies that the Program leaders do not control its development – the aim is to give all participants ownership and the right to develop ideas which may 'take' in their environment, or not. As an example of how initiatives develop within the MEP community of practice, the idea of whole staff training came about through an individual teacher at one school, Macgregor Primary School, undertaking MEP training. She enthusiastically returned to her school and asked the Principal to consider a training session for the entire staff. In this case, the Principal, himself a democratic individual, took a staff vote resulting in a whole-staff one day workshop. The staff then voted as a block to undertake an intensive 32 hour, 16 week training program. Within weeks the amount of music making in the school increased dramatically, with a regular outreach program and observation sessions for teachers from other schools wishing to develop the Program.

Having the flexibility to move in and out of school, as well as other community environments, allows the MEP to support activity as appropriate, but also collect ideas as they develop within the Community of Practice and pass them on to other users. For example, the Principal of Macgregor Primary School was responsible for another initiative which has become known as RAPS – Random Acts of Playing and Singing. He would walk around the school and, as he passed a group of students in the corridor or in a class, would begin singing a song. The student and teacher would join in, regardless of the activity in which they were involved. Snatches of singing would often be heard in various part of the school throughout the day. The MEP now encourages members of the school Executive, who have more flexibility in location and teaching duties, to take the lead in this way so as to help singing become embedded in the fabric of school rather than appear separate or as an added extra.

The ownership that schools and teachers take over the Program extends to solving problems

within the model. For example, problems with transport can make outreach visits difficult to achieve. For this reason, one teacher came up with the concept of 'in-reach' where groups of community members are brought to the school. Visitors may be grandparents, parents and friends, or senior citizens from care facilities and social clubs. Some schools have well developed relationships with community groups that are now a regular part of the school life. One school has a regular visit from a group of adults with learning difficulties who sing with different groups of children each week. The only difficulty in running the program is the complaints received from classes with children who feel they have not been given the same number of visits with the adult group as others. Other schools run regular extra-curricular community singing nights where children come with family members and help them learn the songs that have been taught at school. Many parents come already knowing the songs because children have taught them at home. Indeed, one school had to redevelop its core set of Kindergarten songs because children with siblings were coming to Kindergarten already singing the entire repertoire taught to them by their older siblings.

How, then do teachers learn to teach the MEP approach? Basically, the learning for the teacher is exactly that which the teacher then is asked to apply to the children. The teacher is regarded as a musical being, whether activated or otherwise. The MEP training programs, which range from 3 hours to several months, with basic and advanced programs available, are less about developing musical skill than they are about activating existing musical capacity and developing the confidence to use it. Since everyone is asked to help encourage and activate the music making of others, the role of the MEP teacher trainer is to treat the teachers exactly as they would the students. Teachers learn the song repertoire and participate in a range of social and musical activities that extend musical development while practising the concept of altruistic intent, including through outreach visits and school observation in practising schools.

Often the greater challenge is for the musician who might be asked to re-think some long-held attitudes and beliefs. The idea of specific and necessary skill development is one such belief that may be challenged. Paradoxically, another challenge may be to allow a child *not* to participate if

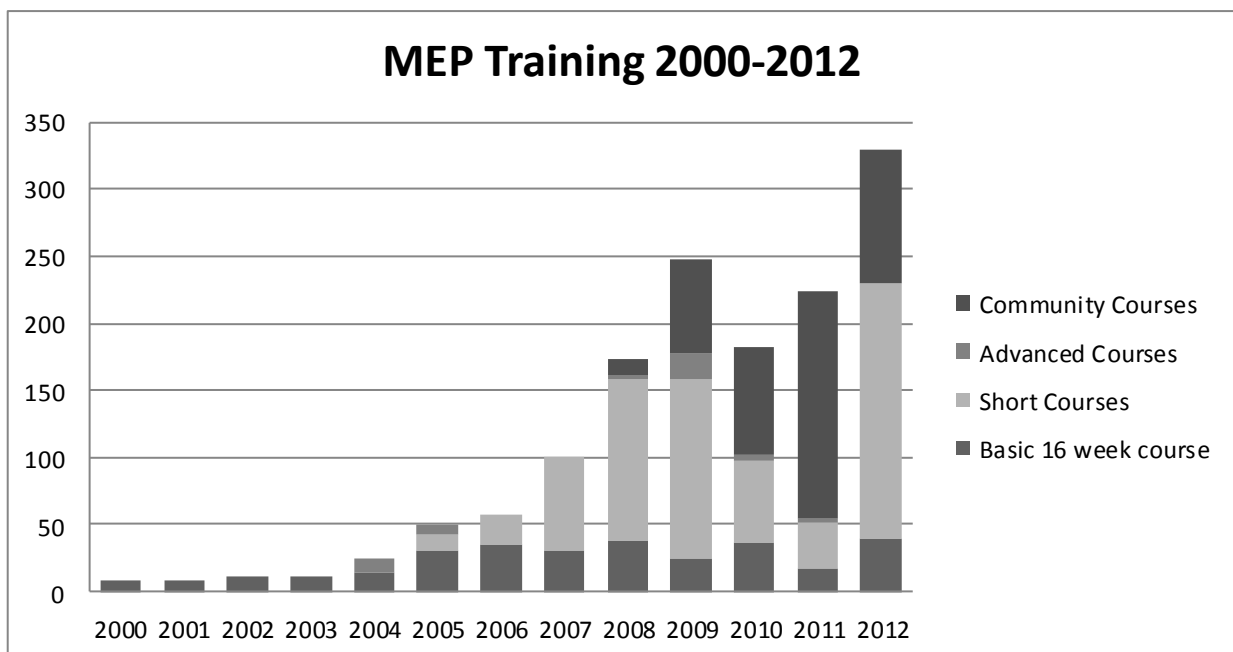
he/she so desires, but also to *allow* a child to participate who is seen as troublesome. Within the MEP music is not withheld as a form of punishment: if, for example, a child wishes to attend an outreach excursion, he is enabled to do so regardless of other behaviour at school, since it is understood that allowing him to do so will be more beneficial for his behaviour than being committed to 'time out.' At the same time, the MEP does not 'use' music making for behaviour management. In some schools, groups of disruptive or socially challenged students are involved in outreach to help the student find an easier path through school, not to 'solve' a management problem.

One other question for the MEP working within, as well as beyond, the school system, involves the vexed question of assessment. If there is no mandated skill, it follows that there can be no mandated assessment and this is exactly the position the MEP takes. It can take this position because it sits outside the school system. However, it also has to recognise that part of its core constituency – teachers and their students – have no such luxury. How is this paradox managed? The MEP has developed a curriculum model that revolves around the idea of social music making but also documents the types of observable social and musical skills that are likely to arise if the model is adopted. The MEP then works with schools as required helping to develop assessment procedures that can remain true to the spirit of the Program while meeting the needs of the assessment model for that school. This problem is less acute in elementary schools in Australia, although it may become more of an issue as the National Curriculum for music unfolds. Philosophically speaking, the MEP model supports a position that says that music making and music learning would be better served if music were 'allowed' to sit outside of assessment procedures altogether. To some extent, this idea has found firmer ground at the High School level, where MEP programs often run within Pastoral Care sessions that are not assessed, or in community service courses. The latter may be criticised as prioritising an archaic extra-musical function of music making. It is true that the extra-musical function of the music making is prioritised but it is not done so in order to assess the community spirit of the participant but rather to avoid assessing

the musicianship of the participant in a way that could be detrimental to his will to participate.

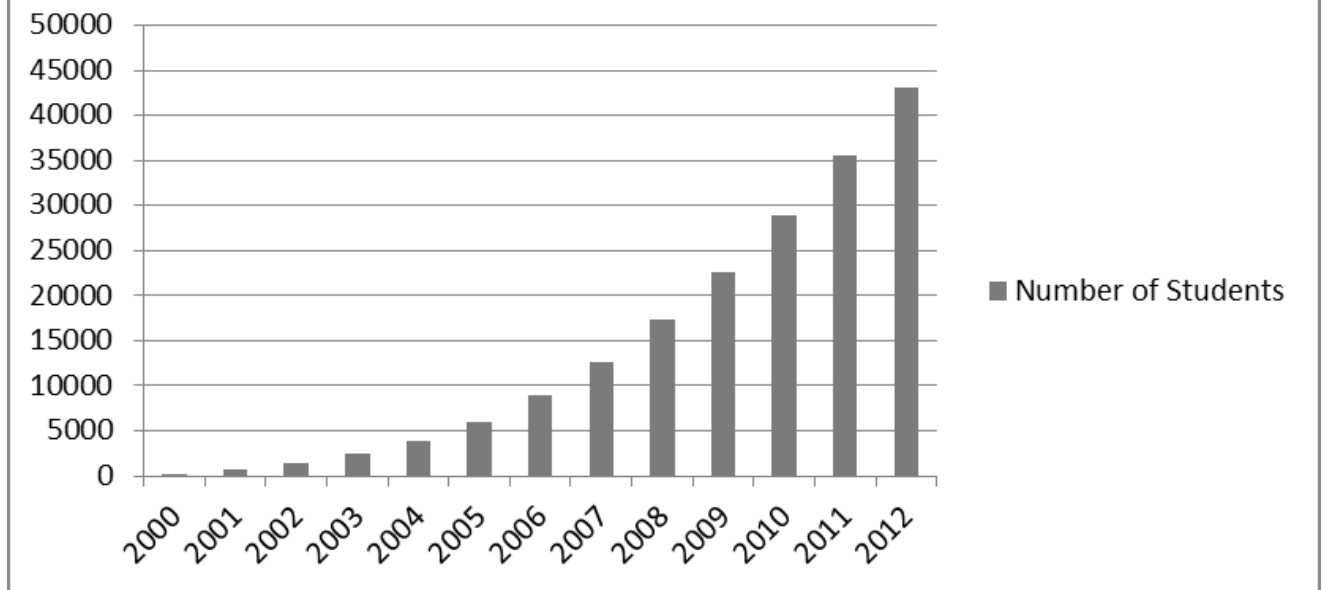
Conclusion

If the MEP is attempting to have an impact upon long-term participatory music making, how successful has it been to date? Graphs 1 and 2 below offer some data on this subject in terms of adults trained and students affected. Long-term tracking is complicated in part by the MEP's success in creating independent activity that cannot always be captured through its data collection methods. The transfer of participatory engagement from school to life is also challenging to capture and is an on-going part of the MEP's development in consultation with larger Government survey agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics. We can confidently claim that the MEP is making a difference, particularly within the Australian Capital Territory which funds its endeavours. Imbuing participants with a sense of the importance of passing on joyous, active music making to others is one way to attempt to influence the music making of the future for everyone.



Graph 1: MEP Training, 2000-2012

Number of Students Affected by the Music Engagement Program 2000-2012



Graph 2: Number of students affected by MEP, 2000-2012

There's A Man Goin' Round

There's a man go - in' round, ta - king names, There's a man go - in' round, ta - king names,

m
d
s,

He has ta - ken my bro - ther's name, And has left my heart in pain, There's a man go - in' round, ta - king names.

Figure 1: There's a Man Goin' Round

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¹⁴ Sang-Hie Lee, "Musicians' performance anxiety and coping strategies" *American Music Teacher Magazine* 52, no. 1 (2002): 36-39; Gabriel Sakakeeny and Heather K. Scott, "From fear to freedom" *Strings* 16, no. 7 (2002): 26-29; David Roland, *The confident performer* (Sydney: Currency Press. 1997).

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³⁹ Elvira Panaiotidi, "What is philosophy of music education and do we really need it?" 198.

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⁴¹ Wayne D. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music*, 5.

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- ⁴³ Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. (New York: Delta, 1969).
- ⁴⁴ Neil Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*. (New York: Delacorte Press, 1979).
- ⁴⁵ Frank Heneghan, *Music Education in Ireland, incorporating the Final Report of the Music Education National Debate (MEND – Phase III)*. (Dublin: 17 September 2001): 98, url MEND <http://www.musicnetwork.ie/content/files/MEND09d.pdf>
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 50.
- ⁴⁷ Elizabeth Gould, “Philosophy in Music Education: relevance, re-vision, renewal,” In Lee Bartel (ed) *Questioning the Music Education Paradigm*, (Toronto: Canadian Music Educators' Association, 2004): 290.
- ⁴⁸ Frank Heneghan, *Music Education in Ireland, incorporating the Final Report of the Music Education National Debate (MEND – Phase III)* and Lee Bartel (ed) *Questioning the Music Education Paradigm*.
- ⁴⁹ John A Sloboda, Jane W Davidson and J A Howe, “Is Everyone Musical?”
- ⁵⁰ Gary E. McPherson, “Creative Minds: Music Education on the Move.” *Forum of Education*, 50, no. 2 (November 1995): 38.
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- ⁵³ Susan M Stevens. *Towards a pragmatist theory of music education*, 19.
- ⁵⁴ West, “Selective Mutism for Singing: conceptualising musical disengagement as mass social dysfunction.”

⁵⁵ In terms of common instrumental development in the USA, it is worth of note that a North American colleague who came and studied the MEP for some months returned to her public school and applied its principles to her band program, including providing opportunities for students at different levels to assist each other and engaging students in choices of repertoire, concert programming and the like.

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⁵⁸ Susan M Stevens. *Towards a pragmatist theory of music education*, 134.

⁵⁹ Elvira Panaiotidi, "What is philosophy of music education and do we really need it?"

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⁶⁴ Government examples in Australia include: "Music education hits the high notes," QLD: Queensland Government, url http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/schoolsandparents/pdfs/12006_p20_21.pdf,

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<http://www.glendalps.vic.edu.au/uploads/Importance%20of%20Music%20in%20Schools.pdf>

⁶⁵ url

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