

What is the purpose of primary music education? Does the purpose of primary music education differ between the state and independent schooling sectors?

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What is the purpose of primary music education? Does the purpose of primary music education differ between the state and independent schooling sectors?

1. Introduction

Within English primary schools music education is a contested field of research, policy and practice. This essay attempts to explore the purpose of music education in these institutions and uncover any discrepancies between the purposes of music education within the state and independent schooling sectors. I intend to draw from broad and multi-faceted research areas and delineate socio-geographical and socio-economic difficulties (e.g. the between state and independent education), governmental and Initial Teacher Training (ITT) standpoints, Young's (2016) concept of 'powerful knowledge' (p. 111) and the effects of these on the curriculum, pedagogy, musical-provision and consequently the access to - *and the purpose of* – primary music education.

According to Clift, Hancox, Staricoff and Whitmore (2008 : 8) music has an inherently constructive and developmental effect on individuals. Fundamental 'cognitive capacities' are stimulated by participating in musical activities which enhance memory, concentration and attention (Clift *et al*, 2008 : 8). Levitin (2006) supports this observable effect of music stating, "musical activity involves nearly every region of the brain that we know about and nearly every neural subsystem." (p. 299). This is also affirmed by Gojmerac (2018) who stipulates "the brain responds bilaterally across frontal, temporal, parietal and occipital lobes when triggered by music." (p.3)

Music making and therefore *musical listening* also augments psychological and physiological wellbeing (Clift *et al*, 2008; Karageorghis and Terry, 2009). Clift (2008 *et al* : 8) delineates an array of positively influencing factors attributed to collaborative music making. This includes increased self-confidence and self-esteem, stronger inter-personal relationships and social bonding and the reduction of emotional anxiety (Clift *et al*, 2008 : 8). In addition, The Royal Conservatory of Music (2014 : 3) attributes increased attention and focus, increased empathy and emotional comprehension aptitude and improved language ability as a direct outcome of receiving musical education. The British Association for Music Therapy (2012 : 1) states social and play skills are developed in vulnerable young children alongside general communicative skills through music therapy. Music therapy shares many beneficial similarities with music education particularly within the context of special educational needs and disabilities (Mawby, 2015) as the crux of the musical interventions develops fundamental musical skills e.g. rhythmic awareness. In extension, music is a significant tool for chronically ill patients to influence and control pain levels (Lamont, Greasley and Sloboda, 2016 : 7) this is also affirmed by Sabzevari, Kianifar, Jafari, Saeidi, Ahanchian, Kiani and Jarahi. (2017) who noted that when children listened to music during endoscopy their pain and anxiety levels were reduced. Music's inherent ability to transcend both physical and emotional pain (Clift *et al*, 2008) through music-making whilst developing and/or influencing an array of developmental factors, in my opinion, underpins and highlights the purpose of primary music education regardless of funding status. During this introduction it was paramount to illustrate and therefore highlight a wide-breadth of core beneficial factors e.g. the augmentation of psychological and physiological wellbeing (Clift *et al*, 2008; Karageorghis and Terry, 2009) which, in my opinion, is relevant to a wide demographic of children in contrasting funding spheres. For the same motives it was also imperative not just to reconnoitre 'traditional' classroom based educational settings e.g.

NHS based Music Therapy. The purpose of primary music education, in my opinion, is more than a classroom experience and should have an holistic effect on the entirety of a child's academic and social development.

Although music is well-documented for enhancing cognitive performance (Hallam, 2016; Lamont *et al*, 2016; Hallam, 2010; Hargreaves 2012; Karageorghis and Terry, 2009; Clift *et al*, 2008) there is a range of research which contradicts this empowering quality (Lamont *et al*, 2016 : 4 - 5). For example, listening to music whilst completing tasks e.g. private study has been proven to have contradictory positive and negative effects on cognition, task completion and thus the quality of work (Lamont *et al*, 2016 : 4 - 5).

From a practical educationalist standpoint music has the transformative power to enhance meaning (Trimble and Hesorffer, 2017; Lamont *et al*, 2016; Dillon, 2007) and therefore using musical techniques to ensure memorability in traditionally 'non-musical' subjects. In my professional teaching practice, whilst delivering 'non-musical' primary subjects e.g. German, harnessing music, in my opinion, gained this transformative power to enhance meaning as specified by Trimble and Hesorffer, 2017; Lamont *et al*, 2016 and Dillon, 2007. This was achieved through heightening memorability and emotional significance by transferring German numbers into a music-workshop singing setting. This crossdisciplinarity approach lead to pupils being on-task, more participations/engagement and pupils demonstrating a greater collective knowledge of the teaching.

The aforementioned 'core-factors' and their conglomerative effects on wider-learning e.g. meaning enhancements underpins many of the more-complex discussions that will be synthesised within this essay.

## 2. Context

Music education in the primary sector is fractured, inconsistent and wholly unpredictable (Zeserson, Welch, Burn, Saunders and Himonides 2014). This is caused by a raft of issues and *in-part* due to generalist teachers i.e. 'non-specialists' (Hargreaves et al, 2002). Generalist Primary teachers - *whilst often competent in a range of subjects* – lack the theoretical understanding and practical confidence whilst delivering music in the classroom (Holden and Button, 2006). Young (2016) states "schools need teachers with that specialist knowledge" (p. 110) to interlock and formulate 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2016) – see 4. *Discussion*. This generalist reliance is, in my opinion, also exasperated by the current National Curriculum. There are only two pages of general guidance for the *entirety* of a child's Primary music education (Department for Education, 2013). It is essential that this document has specialist teachers and/or those with specialist knowledge, training and/or skills to interpret the guidance to effectively harness music's purpose in the primary school. This skills-gap fundamentally stems from inadequate Initial Teacher Training (ITT), non-existent CPD, under-funded/under-supported 'Music Co-ordinators' (Zeserson *et al* 2014) and, in my opinion, the stigma carried by some teachers and Senior Leadership Teams of Music being a 'waste of resources'. For instance in my state-based primary ITT there was limited regular music-making and/or lessons other than the lesson sequences I delivered. These factors undermine the intrinsic purpose of and values of music education in primary music education and the wide-ranging conceivable effects - see 1. *Introduction* - as the quality of the provision is significantly impaired.

This ‘fractured inconsistency’ is arguably expedited by the Conservative introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) resulting in less young people – *particularly from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds* - taking arts-related subjects at KS3 and KS4 (Hill, 2018). This directly affects Music provision at a primary level e.g. if there is less of a demand at KS3 and KS4 it becomes more problematic to justify funding for specialist staff and resources.

In 2011, The National Plan for Music Education (NPME) devolved certain musical curricula responsibilities to ‘Music Hubs’ (Department for Education, 2011). In specific geographical areas the uptake of instrumental lessons has increased (as an measurable effect of ‘music hubs’) although often only ‘Taster Lessons’ and/or ‘First Access’ schemes are promoted (MU, 2014). This is not a coherent, graduated or developmentally long-term approach to music education and arguably panders to the financially able. Once ‘First Access’ schemes are completed pupils from more-deprived background are often unable to fund their lessons (MU, 2014). These policy changes support the assumption that music education is purposed to be exclusive, for the financially able and/or ‘elite and *by extension* those in independent or privatised education.

This is in stark contrast to David Blunkett’s 1998 statement “every child should get the opportunity to learn an instrument” (Purves, 2017 : 170) and reaffirmed within the National Plan for Music Education “[music] must not become the preserve of those children whose families can afford to pay for music tuition.” (Department for Education, 2011 : 3)

### 3. Literature review

#### a. *Shift in policy*

Neo-liberalism is a complex element of global-economic theory (Ross and Gibson, 2006; Thorsen and Lie, 2009) affecting numerous aspects of society including education (Ross and Gibson, 2006 : 1). Young (2016 : 147) suggests neo-liberalism governs the purpose of schooling and thus supports the ‘needs of the economy’ (2016 : 147). This considered shift to ‘mass vocationalism’ (Young, 2016 : 147) supports the UK’s prevalent anti-egalitarian education system through establishing “competitive markets in public services such as education” (Kumar & Hill, 2009 : 1). Notably, this privatisation *or embodiment of neo-liberalism* (Martinez and Garcia, 1997) is considered ‘near-global’ (Kumar & Hill, 2009 : 1) and drives educational inequality and the UK’s intrinsic problem with geographically-based social mobility (Social Mobility Commission, 2017), consumerism (Monbiot, 2017) through ‘improving human capital’ (Young, 2016 : 107). The legal-identity of schools has also experienced a fundamental shift (West and Wolfe, 2018) through the 2010 Conservative-led ‘Coalition and Academies Act 2010’ (HM Government, 2010). It became easier and in certain cases financially beneficial to devolve schools into academisation and/or free schools (West and Wolfe, 2018 : 4) encouraging sponsorship from private organisations. Within the UK 22%, or to contextualise, 3,748 of all state-primary schools are either academies or free schools (West and Wolfe, 2018 : 12). This policy shift re-purposed the market of music education and thus affects Music Education as an entity becoming ‘customer based’ rather than a purposeful and intrinsic part of a child’s education. This ‘customer based’ approach developed after 1988 - *before the aforementioned devolution of music services to form ‘Music Hubs’* - through the LMS (Local Management of Schools) privatising particular council departments (Purves, 2017). This embodied neo-liberalism allowed music services to react to the needs of the economy with both positive and negative consequences in a supply and

demand model. This privatisation expanded musical provision to more diverse primary aged demographics (Purves, 2017). State schools were able to demand more significant musical provisions as ‘customers’ (Purves, 2017) although around thirty to fifty music services were decommissioned in the process (Purves, 2017).

#### *b. Advantages of neo-liberalism*

This “reassertion of the power of finance” (Duménil and Lévy, 2001 : 579) through neo-liberalism has numerous benefits. This includes ‘added value’ through prioritisation of the economy (Robertson, 2007 : 11), a systematic and substantiated use of resources *in part* due to competitive education markets/models (Robertson 2007 : 11), reduction in public expenditure for education services (Robertson 2007 : 1; Martinez and Garcia, 1997 : 2) as alternative sources of income are encouraged from individual households businesses/public-private partnerships (Robertson, 2007 : 11) and teachers performance based pay (Robertson, 2007 : 12). Performance based pay motivates both the employer and employee and “attract[s] and retain[s] the most productive teachers” (Lavy, 2007 : 91) although it is often challenging to measure (Lavy, 2007). This re-evaluation of finance through neo-liberalism theoretically opens a competitive market amongst state primary schools and independent preparatory schools to attract and retain the most productive educative talent and consequentially benefiting the purposing of music in the primary sector.

#### *c. Disadvantages of neo-liberalism*

A global-impact of neo-liberalism is the wealth gap between the wealthy and impoverished increasing (Beder, 2009 : 4) this, alongside escalating individual accountability in essence eradicates the concept of community (Martinez and Garcia, 1997 : 2) putting unprecedented pressure on the poorest in society (Martinez and Garcia, 1997 : 2). Through the deregulation and apparent casualisation of labour markets (Dalingwater, 2018 : 2) which was instilled by neo-liberalism (Martinez and Garcia, 1997 : 2) there has been a significant rise in the reliance on zero-hour contracts and/or casual working for the music educator (MU, 2014 : 6). This is also *in-part* due to the reorganisation of music deliverance through the competitive ‘Music Hub’ funding models – *see 1. Context*. Due to the implied difficulties of the sector it is also challenging to attract more experienced educators:

Tutors are on zero hours contracts. The majority of tutors are recently out of college and are inexperienced in teaching, especially large groups of young children. (MU, 2014 : 6).

#### *d. Purpose of private schooling*

Private schooling alumni profit from an ‘economic premium in the labour market’ (Green, Ander, Henderson and Henseke, 2017 : 1). There is a traditional association between so-called ‘elite education’ and higher ‘social classes’ (Green et al, 2017; Kenway and Langmead, 2017; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2016, 2015; Nair, 2010; West, Norden, Edge, Miriam and Davies, 1998) with their alumni disproportionately inhabiting strategic and often powerful positions across a variety of sectors including politics (Maxwell et al, 2015 : 7). This is confirmed from a political standpoint by Evans & Tilley (2011 : 38) “across government as a whole two thirds of Ministers were privately educated.” Nair (2010 : 1) suggests that the

institutions brand is more important than quality of education received. The institutions 'brand', in certain cases, 'essentially works to exclude' (Doherty and Pozza, 2017 : 5) and diffusing upper social classes traditions (White, 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009).

'Elite schooling' is referenced throughout educationalist literature (Green et al, 2017; Doherty and Pozza, 2017; Kenway and Langmead, 2017; Maxwell and Aggleton, 2015; Nair, 2010; West et al, 1998 etc.) and for clarification is a *relative* term, that is dependent on the context of the discussion (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). Although there *doesn't appear to be* a definitive definition 'elite schools' often have striking academic examination results, high-proportion of pupils entering high-ranking Universities with fees and facilities meriting such status (Maxwell and Aggleton, 2016 : 2). These institutions are considered by van Zanten (2015) to produce 'elites' or those with "the possession of resources allowing for the hoarding and monopolization of desired positions, opportunities and honours" (p. 4). Maxwell and Savage (2015 :169) states:

Attending elite educational institutions at either secondary or higher education level increases the likelihood of entering elite positions [upon graduation].

Young (2006 : 109) extends this stating participants of elite educational institutions acquire 'powerful knowledge' and/or 'specialist knowledge' (Young, 2016 : 109) – *see 4. Discussion*. This also permeates the primary educational market as independent preparatory schools are designed to "[prepare] pupils for entry into public schools and private secondary schools" (Good School Guide, 2019 : 1). In the context of the purpose of primary music education it's important to reiterate Wakeling and Savage's (2015) proposition that experiencing an 'elite education' does not necessarily assure elite outcomes.

#### *e. Purpose of state Primary schools*

The Department for Education (2015) states "education is the engine of our economy" (p. 1) which harks back to neo-liberalistic policy changes to prioritise the needs of the economy (Robertston, 2007). Primary education within the UK has witnessed significant change in-part due to child-centred education pedagogy and social policy development (Schuayb and O'Donnell, 2008). Child-centred educational philosophies - *arising from 1960's and 1970's government standpoints* - gave educationalists the power to "bring about equality and social change" (Schuayb and O'Donnell, 2008 : 24-25). Importantly, these pedagogical approaches are widespread within music-education (Finney, 2011; Turner, 1999) although notably contested. Alexander (2009) reconnoitres the "decidedly questionable record of child-centred teaching in Western classrooms" (p. 3). Following the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 in the Education Reform Act (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988) the Department for Education (2013 : 5) specified that every state funded school:

Promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The above is in direct contrast to independent education as private schooling, in certain cases, essentially exclude proportions of the population (Doherty and Pozza, 2017 : 5). White (2007) stipulates the aforementioned NC supports "everyone at equal value to lead a satisfying life" (p. 24). Government funded primaries are a vehicle for the National

Curriculum as it is mandatory to deliver this curriculum throughout the majority of schools to directly support the Department for Education's (2018) vision "to provide world-class education, training and care for everyone, whatever their background" (pp. 1).

*f. Contrasts between private and state schooling*

Adonis and Pollard (1997) considered the segregation between independent and state education as 'social apartheid'. This is a hallmarked return to the social inequality of the Edwardian period (National Equality Panel, 2010) as pupils with a state schooling background - *regardless of whether primary or secondary* - are statistically less likely to embark upon higher-education (The Sutton Trust, 2017). Private schooling more effectively supports a wide-berth of 'all-inclusive' education than their state schooling counterparts through granting financial, social and time investment into the arts (Tozer, 2016 : 687). The term 'all-inclusive', in this context, is particularly misleading due to the selective nature of independent schooling (Exley and Suissa, 2013). This also promotes apparent exclusivity (Doherty and Pozza, 2017) and the publicly perceived exclusion of "state-educated people from the arts" (Norris, 2018 : 1).

*4. Discussion*

Young (2016) compared educational institutions to families and having a "unique role in reproducing human societies" (p. 105). This initially links back to original intentions of private schooling that is to disperse 'upper social classes' ideology (White, 2015; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009) which *in effect* 'reproduces' human societies (Young, 2016 :105). Secondly, the reproduction of human societies (Young, 2016 : 105) is also prevalent throughout the state primary sector as, in my opinion, this is not restricted to private education. This non-exclusivity of 'social reproduction' (Kurt, 2015), in my opinion, is achieved through upholding the governmentally regulated National Curriculum in state-based education. Cultural aspirations are reproduced and/or transmitted and consequentially developed (Ekanem and Ekefre, 2013). These factors *in tandem with neo-liberalism* endorse the marketisation of music education in both state and independent sectors, in part, leading to fewer pupils pursuing Music at KS3 and KS4 (Hill, 2018) due to expected cultural transferal. This could be attributed to the financial implications of current musical educational funding models i.e. 'Taster Lessons' are promoted through publicly funded 'music hubs' (MU, 2014). Once these 'Taster' schemes are completed pupils from more deprived background are no-longer able to fund their instrumental lessons (MU, 2014). This has a direct effect on the purpose of music in the Primary sector as the demand, *through qualifications*, is diminishing and thus objectifying public and non-public spending becomes more challenging. This arguably reinforces the "inequalities of social structure" (Collins, 2009 : 34) and the 'elitist' nature of music education in the UK and further afield. Richardson (2007) states that 'elitism' is also a US phenomenon. Longer-term access is granted through guardians-funding lessons (MU, 2014) which simply not all guardians can afford (MU, 2014; Farthing, 2014) or justify, *as the accumulating evidence suggests*, the diminishing purposing of music education in the primary sector. These 'elitist' connotations are publicly reaffirmed by Turner (2018) stating "music is becoming the preserve of the privileged few" (pp. 1). It should be notated that ironically the limited Music curriculum in KS1 and KS2 focuses on developing instrumental techniques (Department for Education, 2013). Instrumental technique development depends *in part* on individual tuition to achieve

higher levels of musical accomplishment, which as I have argued, is a challenging demand for certain socio-economic groups to meet.

The aforementioned factors devalue and thus directly affect the *potential* purposing of music in the curriculum and the rich array of benefits to primary pupils to develop core ‘cognitive capacities’ (Clift *et al*, 2008 : 8) *see Introduction and Context*.

Young (2016) delineates the purposing of schools through two classifications of knowledge. Firstly, ‘context independent’ Young (2016 : 111) is considered ‘powerful knowledge’ which is *often* specialist but over-arching in nature leading to the foundations of decision making as numerous knowledge sources are considered and combined. Music education stimulates multiple ‘cognitive capacities’ (Clift *et al*, 2008 : 8) and practically every region of the brain (Goimerac, 2018; Levitin, 2009) leading to the formation of ‘powerful knowledge’ (Young, 2016 :111) e.g. combining numerous sources of knowledge to form stronger, inter-personal relationships (Clift *et al*, 2008 : 8). Secondly, ‘context dependant’ (Young : 111) knowledge clarifies how to achieve specific and *often* isolated skills e.g. the mechanics of playing a musical scale on the piano. Learning specific ‘context dependant’ (Young, 2016) musical skills contributes to ‘powerful knowledge’. These classifications, in my opinion, are not distinct entities and experiences multiple cross-overs as numerous skills are required to perform music e.g. motor skills, co-ordination and specific instrumentally relatable skills. Through music learners attain and attribute ‘powerful knowledge’ e.g. team working, self-efficiency and self-management (Basset, 2013 : 39). Young (2016) suggests that ‘powerful knowledge’ isn’t successfully transmitted in schools (pp. 111) although, in my opinion, it would be extremely difficult to measure due to the apparent breadth, blurred boundaries and classification issues surrounding ‘powerful knowledge’. However, this relates back to Tozer’s (2016) notion of ‘all-inclusive’ (pp. 687) private schooling investment and purposing of the arts (in comparison to the state sector), the global impacts of neo-liberalism (Beder, 2009) and music educations financial reliance on the private sector (MU, 2014). I agree with Young’s (2016) statement: “elite cultures that are less constrained by the material exigencies” (pp. 111) and are significantly advantaged due to accessing a wider plateau of experience and education whilst developing ‘power knowledge’ (Young, 2016).

These notions are further exasperated through Bernstein’s in Young (2016) theorems of ‘knowledge boundaries’ (pp. 111 – 112). Within the concept of ‘knowledge framing’ there are two opposing streams (Young, 2016). Framing can be *strong* e.g. when school and non-school knowledge are decidedly isolated from each other or *weak* e.g. when the boundaries between school and non-school knowledge are distorted (Young, 2016). There is a high-transferability within arts-based subjects as humanities experience little insulation between subjects (Young, 2016). This is particularly relevant when comparing the purposing of music education in the primary sector as, in my opinion, ‘knowledge framing’ (Young, 2016) within the independent schooling sector is *weak* with a wider-field of school and non-school knowledge blurring and consequentially the pupils degree of success is higher due to their wealth and not necessarily inherent ability.

Within the concept of ‘powerful knowledge’ and/or ‘knowledge boundaries’ (Young, 2016) state schools are at a significant disadvantage as, in my opinion and experience, their music education is more ‘context dependent’ e.g. focusing on specific skills rather than gaining the aforementioned - *and elitist* - ‘powerful knowledge’ through a wider-range of activities and experiences. Within the state-sector, in my opinion, this is due to generalist



teaching/training (Hargreaves et al, 2002), the lack of theoretical knowledge (Holden and Button, 2006) and inadequate ITT from a musical standpoint (Zeserson et al, 2014) in correlation with the neo-liberalist funding models previously discussed. This is in direct comparison to independent sector schooling as at primary level *most* will receive tuition from a specialist teacher in the field as evidenced on numerous independent preparatory school websites.

## 5. Conclusion

Music education, in my opinion, has been intrinsically devalued through neo-liberalism, reliance on pay-on-demand education models and policy shifts in favour of the general economy and not necessarily the individual. This has the most significant impact on the state primary sector and consequentially there is a decreased demand (in part due to the EBacc) at KS3 and KS4 (Hill, 2018). Music education consequently has less significance and/or 'bargaining power' at the start of a child's formal educational journey. Music education however is integral to reproduce and develop societies.

The purpose of music education generally should be to instil a wide-berth of 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2016) enhancing cognitive performance, social functioning and/or psychological/physical health regardless of sector. Access to 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2016) is dependant on socio-economic status due to the 'elitist' nature of accessing music education as explored above. Music education, in my opinion, is still the preserve of the affluent and those who can afford to pay.

This is not to say the *purpose of music education* is necessarily different between the state and independent sectors, but the outcomes and effects of music education vary considerably. This however is not conclusive due to the requirement for further research which is beyond the scope of this essay.

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