

Erratum

Editorial

Music education: Why bother? - ERRATUM

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Unfortunately the March 2017 issue of the journal contained the wrong version of the editorial. The correct version is contained in this erratum.

The Editors apologise for the error.

Editorial

Music education: Why bother?

One of the common questions asked of music educators is some sort of variation on ‘music education – why bother?’

‘Children and young people’, the questioner usually states, ‘will get on fine, they’ll learn to play instruments and sing if they want to, so why not let the more important subjects in school have the time and money spent on such fripperies?’ Usually answering this sort of question requires a deep breath, and a moment to consider what to say so as not to appear too rude. It seems that this question, or one of its near cognates, is increasingly coming to the fore in times of fiscal and social retrenchment. But what do we say, so as to try to silence forever these ill-informed interlocutors? Here in the pages of the *British Journal of Music Education* we endeavour to present arguments each issue as to *why* music education is important. But our questioner is unlikely to have read these. In many countries the place of advocacy is high on the list of ways to deal with this, but clearly advocacy alone is not working, or we would not still be hearing such things. In other jurisdictions it is the external, transferable benefits of music education that are promoted: for example, ‘music makes you smarter’, or ‘music makes you better at numeracy’. These are all well and good, but run the danger of something else supplanting music. Some food supplements allegedly make you smarter, and simply going shopping makes you more numerate, so goodbye music, hello lunch and the high street. It seems likely that we as music educators did not become involved with music simply to promote shopping malls. So what can we say to address such questions?

One of our own subject field problems, covered in a number of these *BJME* editorials *passim* is that we cannot agree amongst ourselves on what music education actually is (Fautley & Murphy, 2015b), or what it should contain (Fautley & Murphy, 2015a). This disagreement is good – it is the sign of a healthy subject domain. It is a truism to note that sport begets competition, and music fosters cooperation, but in neoliberal times, with monetary

and societal 'winners' and 'losers' being represented, in a post-truth fashion, as becoming so as a result of their personal 'life choices', this argument may not carry much weight.

But what we can say is what should surely be one of the key reasons for music and musicking, that music is *the* quintessential human activity (after all it is debatable whether animals intentionally music), and is one that transcends language. As Ian Cross observes:

... music may best be thought of as *a communicative medium that is optimal for the management of situations of social uncertainty*; music is, at root, an excellent means of coordinating social attitudes and behaviours, and can be viewed as complementary to and coextensive in its forms, structures and primitives with speech as an interactive medium. (Cross, 2012)

And surely this is something we need more of in these troubled times? We need to look in to music as a powerful force. Indeed, why else would repressive regimes ban it, or co-opt it for their own twisted ends?

But thinking about music teaching and learning is the primary *raison d'être* of the *British Journal of Music Education*, and so it is to the articles in this present edition that our attention is now turned.

The first piece, by Dimitra Kokotsaki, investigates pupil voice and attitudes to music during the transition from primary to secondary school in the English context, with some helpful pointers to the aspects of this which the young people concerned found to be the most conducive. From England we move to Croatia, from where Snježana Dobrota and Ina Reić Ercegova discuss music preferences with regard to music education, informal influences and familiarity of music amongst young people in Croatia. The notion of the types, styles, and genres of music which young people like is a significant one in terms of their education in formal and informal settings. Their findings add weight to the significance of popular music and 'musical futures' styles of teaching and learning discussed by Kokotsaki in the previous.

From Croatia we move next to Australia, for a study by Sarah J. Powell on the possible selves of males who participate in a choir. This is an important study framed within, as the author puts it, '... the context of an Australian ideology of masculinity'. Thinking about their possible future selves, and the notion of group identities clearly had an influence on the boys and men involved in this study. We stay in Australia for our next article, in which Christopher Coady and Michael Webb describe resisting best-practice in Australian practice-based jazz doctorates. The role of professional practice-based doctorates is a significant one for the international academic community, and this piece raises some interesting discussions which will be worth having both within and beyond the academy. For example, the notion of 'theorisation' and its associated values is a key one in this area.

We leave Australia, and head over to Spain for our next piece, in which José A. Rodríguez-Quiles looks at music teacher training as a precarious area within the Spanish university. We have already mentioned in previous editorials the wide variety of forms which music education takes in different countries; here, the very specific Spanish situation is discussed, and some worrying trends uncovered. For the final piece in this edition, by Barbara Colombo and Alessandro Antonietti, we head across to Italy, where the authors consider the role of metacognitive strategies in learning to play the piano. Thinking about

thinking and thinking about learning are, as we know, key aspects in the process of learning, and the article unpicks this, with some interesting conclusions.

The pages of this edition of the *BJME*, as is so often the case, have taken us to a variety of national locations and research contexts in our continued investigations of what is going on at the moment, and it is to be hoped that the questioner cited in the opening of this editorial will find plenty here to give them pause for thought as to why music education is important, and why its continued study occupies so many people in different parts of the globe. It is also to be hoped that as 'bothering' with music education is an important part of our human activity, policy makers and legislators will continue to dig deep into their coffers to find ways of funding its continued presence. For us researchers, clearly there is still so much more we can learn.

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