

## Editorial

# Inclusion, music education, and what it might mean

The issue of inclusion is currently a hot topic in music education both in the UK and elsewhere. There are many discussions about what it means, what it should involve, and how it can be enacted. This is to say nothing of the positive effects inclusion can have on the lives of young people in terms of personal fulfilment, as well as musical participation. For a journal concerned with educational research in music education, as is clearly the case with the *BJME*, there is, or there should be, more to it, however, than just these simple matters. After all, having children and young people in wheelchairs participating in a musical event is all very well – even if it does not happen often enough – but is this really *all* we mean by inclusion? And it is this aspect which needs problematisation for music education. After all, having young people who are disabled in some form, visible or invisible, taking part in music education should be something which just happens, we shouldn't need, pardon the phrase, to be making a big song and dance about it!

Inclusion can take many forms, and it is sadly sometimes the 'feel-good factor' for the audience which wins out when programming musical events; the nice children with disabilities enjoying themselves singing, the boy in a wheelchair playing a keyboard, the girl on crutches playing a guitar. But these, important as they are, are the tip of a very large iceberg. Music education has contained within it all sorts of exclusory practices which have nothing to do with being physically disabled whatsoever. Let us take as an example the matter of musical taste. In England there is often a cry from music educators that publicly available music examinations, GCSE and A-level, for instance, most benefit those students who play a western classical instrument. Not only that, they privilege students whose socio-economic background is one where they bring with them into the classroom a store of cultural capital. This means that a student who has grown up never having heard classical music, but has, say, a disposition towards playing the drums, and enjoys and succeeds at so doing, is immediately placed at a disadvantage because of their background – an aspect of their life about which they can do nothing. It is not their fault that their background did not involve Mozart and Beethoven, and yet in examination terms they can be inadvertently penalised for this, some would argue.

Which brings us to question what is taking place in educational music teaching and learning situations in schools. Inclusion, as we have argued, is about a wide range of children and young people being catered for. In terms of what is going on in classroom and instrumental music lessons, this is also true, or at least, it can be argued that it should be. The aspect of inclusion we are considering here is that of the inclusion of different types, styles, and genres of music. This is important for the drummer we discussed above. As Michael Young has noted:

The idea that the school is primarily an agency of cultural or knowledge transmission raises the question 'what knowledge?' and in particular what is the knowledge that it is the schools' responsibility to transmit? If it is accepted that schools have this role, then it implies that types of knowledge are differentiated. In other words, for educational

purposes, some types of knowledge are more worthwhile than others . . . (Young, 2008, p. 13)

This is a question that it behoves us to ask ourselves as music educators, and it is also one that as educational researchers we should be asking too. What types of music are valued? By whom? Who might this disenfranchise? Who cares? All of these are difficult questions, but that does not mean we should shy away from them, far from it.

Which brings us back to inclusion. The American film produce Sam Goldwyn is alleged to have said, 'include me out'; what are the implications for children and young people who we might feel we have included, but who feel as though they have been excluded? The examples of this with regards to disabled young people are legion, the child with the use of only one arm being told to shake a maraca in time to the music, whilst the rest of the class learn to play the violin, being but one egregious example among many. Visible disabilities need to be catered for properly, sure, and we must put our house in order on this matter. But sometimes in music education we treat social capital – or lack thereof – as a hidden disability, and seem to do very little about it. This is being researched in a variety of contexts and jurisdictions at the moment, and we at the *BJME* look forward to reading about it in future editions.

Which brings us to the selection of papers in this latest edition. As ever, the articles published in this edition are drawn from music education research from around the globe. They represent some of the wide and diverse contexts in which music education takes place.

The first article in the current edition explores gender perspectives in different phases of music education in Sweden. It argues that there is merit in doing more to understand the relationship between gender and music education.

Following the change of heart by an examination board in England to include female composers in their new A-level specifications (and all brought about from a successful campaign led by 17-year-old Jessy McCabe in 2015), we are pleased to include an article by Dawn Bennett and colleagues that urges music educators to consider 'the pedagogical practices and curricular design that might support aspiring women composers'.

The third article, from Geoffrey Baker, Anna Bull and Mark Taylor, explores the criticality and methodology of studies relating to El Sistema and other programmes that this has inspired around the world. There are some very interesting arguments thread through this article encouraging the reader to question the worth and value of programme evaluations, and the article concludes that 'many Sistema evaluations display an alignment with advocacy rather than explorative research'.

Paul Draper and Scott Harrison's article 'Beyond a Doctorate of Musical Arts: Experiences of its impact on professional life' explores experiences of Australian students enrolled on a practice-based doctoral research programme in relation to the impact of doctoral study on their professional lives. It further interrogates the conclusion of their previous (2011) research, namely:

. . . that creative and performing artists will increasingly colonize, then dominate their own research space . . . to progress and redefine musical practice . . . less informed

by orthodox academic assumptions but more so by authentic practice-led knowledge work.

Through exploring the lived experiences of students, the article also addresses some interesting assumptions found in literature and research in other domains.

Staying in Australia, Leah Coutts' article 'Selecting motivating repertoire for adult piano students: A transformative pedagogic approach' describes her own approaches to motivating adult piano students and how she has been challenged to reflect upon and adapt her own pedagogical approaches and repertoire choices. The concluding suggestions put the relationships between the teacher and student at the heart of motivating and challenging students, alongside prioritising time and space for reflection and a willingness to adapt and develop.

The final article in this issue takes the reader into secondary schools in Singapore. Hoon Hong Ng's article 'Enabling popular music teaching in the secondary classroom: Singapore teachers' perspectives' explores the perceived effectiveness and success of implementing popular music practices in three secondary schools. It identifies a number of diverse factors which were found to enable the delivery of popular music programmes in these schools, and the conclusions will no doubt be of interest to those teaching and working in music education around the world.

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### Reference

YOUNG, M. (2008) 'What are schools for?' In H. Daniels, H. Lauder & J. Porter (eds.), *Knowledge, Values and Educational Policy: A Critical Perspective* (Vol. 2). London: Routledge.