The Implementation Of The New P-10 Arts Syllabus: The Teachers’ Voices

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How do music teachers cope when faced with implementing a new syllabus? In Queensland a new Arts syllabus years 1-10 has been introduced with compulsory implementation and reporting processes to be in place by 2006. This paper is the continuation of a research project that has raised the issues confronting music teachers in this situation. Interviews have been conducted with eight secondary music teachers in State high schools where syllabus implementation is mandatory. The teachers were questioned in regard to their philosophy on music education and how it relates to the new syllabus, in-service and resources, implementation processes, and assessment and reporting. Their ‘voices’ will be detailed and discussed in this paper.

Introduction

Fullan (1991, p. 3) states that “everything must change at one time or another or else a static society will evolve”. Teachers then could expect that throughout their career there will be some changes made in the curriculum they teach. However, many teachers may wish to continue doing what they have been doing for as long as they can. Marsh & Willis (1999) point out that teachers are in a key position to reject a new curriculum, whether through indifference, ignorance, fear, or a well-warranted belief that the new curriculum will prove inferior to the old one. However, Smith & Lovatt (2003) believe that when dealing with curriculum change, we need to consider both the content (the concepts, skills and ideas) and the process (the processes by which teachers will be introduced to the new curriculum and become committed to its importance and implement it in the classrooms).

A new Arts Syllabus Years 1 to 10 (2002) has recently been introduced in Queensland. This is a positive step for the Arts as it means that the Arts are now a recognised and mandatory core KLA (Key Learning Area). The Arts syllabus has five strands – dance, drama, media, music, and visual arts. As a result of this structure however, music teachers are concerned that music is now only one fifth of a subject and there are concerns that this may have an effect on the standards in music education that have been achieved in the past in Queensland schools (I think we should add a reference of qld success) I will try and find one.

Background to the Music Syllabus (Years 1 to 10) in Queensland

Primary – Years 1 to 7

In 1977/78 a pilot music program was begun in three primary schools. In these three schools all classes from years 1 to 7 had weekly music lessons with the specialist music teacher. In addition, the general classroom teacher was expected to do daily follow-up sessions with their classes. This programme was a developmental program based on the Kodaly methodology and modelled on the Metropolitan West Sydney Music Research Project. By 1983, seven year level booklets were published. These booklets contained an overview for the year level and lessons plans that could be implemented weekly. These booklets became the unofficial music syllabus for primary schools. In 1996 *Music Syllabus and Guidelines Years 1 to 7* was published by the Department of Education. This document represented the official departmental document designed to support music education in Queensland primary schools. It was based on the seven year booklets and became an interim document pending the future arts syllabus development.

Junior Secondary – Years 8 to 10

The first Queensland Secondary School Music Syllabus was published in 1966. This presented music as a compulsory but non-examinable subject to be taken for one thirty-five minute period per week in Grades 8 to 10. With the establishment of the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, syllabuses in both Junior and Senior music were issued early in 1988. As this was considered irrelevant and not contemporary most junior music teachers developed their own program and did not have any accountability. This was the last time any new developments were made in the junior music area until the introduction of the new P-10 Arts Syllabus.

What issues do music teachers (or teachers of any subject) need to address when faced with implementing a new curriculum? Grundy (1993, p. 42) suggests that curriculum developer’s aim “for the teacher-proof curriculum” because classroom teachers adapt curriculum recommendations. Teachers do have to adapt curriculum recommendations however teachers have different teaching
styles and beliefs and different classes in different schools are made up of different students, both culturally, socially and economically. These factors will impact on how the curriculum is to be implemented in the classroom.

The Project
To investigate the implementation of the music strand of the new syllabus a five stage research project has been commenced. The first stage of this project involved raising issues that may be of concern when teachers are confronted with a new syllabus. These issues were raised by Hartwig at the 2003 ASME Conference. They include:

1. How will each music teacher’s own theoretical framework of music education fit with the philosophical underpinnings of the new document?
2. How will teachers with different teaching styles and beliefs interpret the new syllabus?
3. Will the new syllabus accommodate different schools made up of students with a wide variety of diverse characteristics and needs?
4. Is the core content relevant and contemporary?
5. What methodology will be the most effective method of implementing this syllabus?
6. How will music be assessed within this new framework – and from years 1 to 10?
7. What relationships will former music curriculum documents have with the new document?
8. What inservice will be provided to assist teachers understand and implement the syllabus?

In Stage 2 of the research eight secondary music teachers in the state system were interviewed. In selecting the teachers for interview, every effort was made to gain a balance in regards to geographic position of the school, student population and socio-economic area. To maintain anonymity both the schools and the teachers have been given pseudonyms. The teachers were asked questions that were drawn from the issues raised in Stage 1. It was decided to interview secondary music teachers at this stage as the new syllabus represented a very different approach to what had previously been recognised for the junior secondary music program.

The teachers were asked questions according to the themes raised in Stage 1 of the research.

Pre-Questions
Teachers were initially asked whether they had viewed the syllabus and if so to what extent. There was disparity between the teachers as to how much they were familiar with the text from having not read it but had heard some information about it to having a solid knowledge of the document. The latter was particularly evident with recent graduates who had studied the document in their undergraduate study programs.

Given the teachers varied level of knowledge they were asked whether the P-10 concept would be more effective than past practices in the secondary Junior Music program. There was a common sentiment that the idea would be effective as long as the application was done properly.

Some teachers highlighted that the overriding concept of the new syllabus was so different to existing structure and programs that unless the outcomes based philosophy was understood and applied properly then practices may not necessarily be any different to past practices.

Philosophy of Music Education and the New Syllabus
This led to philosophy of music education and how the document aligned with teachers’ individual approach to teaching and learning.

Firstly, the teachers were asked what they believed to be the strengths of the new syllabus. There was a consistent agreement that the positive language of outcomes based approach to learning was a strength of the new syllabus. The teachers agreed that the syllabus encouraged a focus on what the students could do rather than what they could not as in criteria based syllabi. As a result of this the teachers also agreed that to acknowledge students with different levels of ability in one class could be achieved more easily with this particular syllabus. They were glad that each individual student could achieve positive results depending on what level they were working at. In addition, the teachers liked the possibility of working with a portfolio system of assessment stating that students’ work would more likely to be kept up to date and compact. The teachers envisaged that they would develop
comprehensive student profiles that addressed each of the outcomes as outlined in the document. Some of the teachers also liked the straightforward layout of the document. This included the presentation of the modules, CD rom and sourcebooks. Contrary to this one teacher felt that the presentation could be simplified and that the support material had created a bit too much hype and were not all that helpful.

Teachers were then asked to identify what they thought were the weaknesses of the syllabus. There was a strong consistency in the view that the Kodaly language and focus of the syllabus was not appropriate for most secondary school contexts. Coupled with this was the view that the repertoire suggested for use in the classroom was seen as inappropriate, in that it was at much too low a level or childish for secondary students. Some outcomes were seen as ‘ridiculous’ expectations of students at that level. There was a perception that unless primary teachers achieved the levels expected, secondary levels (from level 4 up) would be unachievable with most students. There was also the view that it would be difficult for primary music specialists to achieve this in the standard half hour music specialist lessons per week. Some teachers believed that this would place expectations on general primary teachers to assist in the delivery of music education. The CD rom examples were said to be extremely unrealistic for the visited schools’ contexts

**Implementation Processes**

Each teacher had considered implementation and this varied from running the program from Year 8-10 currently to deciding to hold off until implementation is mandatory. Comments such as - “We are just hoping that by the time it is time to implement there will be another change” or “We are not going to change things too much. We will just make it fit into what we are already doing” were common amongst the interviewees.

The sentiment that implementation of the syllabus would work well if done properly indicated positive thoughts by the teachers. However, the teachers also indicated that they would have to change current programs quite distinctly if implementing an outcomes based program effectively.

According to the teachers the degree to which the syllabus had started to be implemented in their school was largely determined by the administration. The teachers agreed that if the administration were familiar with the syllabus themselves and willing to embrace the changes associated with outcomes based programs then implementation was more easily achieved.

Some schools had developed timelines and specific plans for implementation that took into account the compulsory implementation and reporting deadline of 2006. There was a common approach to begin implementing with Year 8 classes initially and follow with year 8 and 9, and then 8, 9 and 10 – as in a staggered progression. Others had considered implementing all three year levels only when expected, that is 2006.

**In-service**

Each teacher, with the exception of one, had attended at least one formal in-service session concerned with the new P-10 syllabus. A number of general sessions ‘in-school’ had also occurred for teachers primarily on pupil-free days.

Teachers agreed that the in-service programs presented by the implementation team themselves, were extremely informative and helpful particularly in regard to navigating the support materials such as the CD rom and modules.

**Assessment and Reporting**

When asked how the teachers would assess within the new framework they believed that they would develop an ongoing portfolio system of assessment. They also were happy with the flexibility of assessment tasks and felt that this would address the varying levels and abilities of students in their classes. Most of the teachers intended to have a comprehensive documentation of students’ achievements. Two of the teachers however, stated that they would not change the practices that they currently had in place.

In regard to reporting there was a great degree in variance in approach to this by the teachers. There was strong evidence that the approach to reporting depended largely on the support of the administration in the school. Some of the teachers believed that their administration were not interested in implementing the new syllabus despite them being mandatory and as such felt it difficult
to implement the syllabus successfully into their programs. Others were content that their administration were not expecting much change in the way that they reported student achievements and therefore would continue reporting using criteria (that is A-E results) in conjunction with using outcomes in the classroom environment. Contrary to this a number of the teachers were adamant that the syllabus could not be implemented correctly unless reporting processes changed to outcomes language.

**Conclusion**

The above data has not provided all the answers, in regard to the implementation of a new syllabus, but has shown there are many variables that have an effect on the teaching of music in our schools especially at the time of the introduction of a new syllabus. The data collected has given a small snapshot of the implementation journey that some government school music teachers are taking. Stage 3 will involve interviewing music teachers working in the private sector. For these teachers, the introduction of the syllabus is optional. It is hoped that this series of interviews will highlight the reasons some private schools are opting to introduce or not introduce the new syllabus.

Further stages of the research project will be conducted over the next eighteen months to continue this investigation of the introduction of the new syllabus. It is hoped that action research projects may be commenced in collaboration with music teachers to discover effective strategies and methods in establishing a successful outcomes based philosophy in the music classroom.

**Bibliography**

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**About the Authors**

Dr Kay Hartwig has taught music from preschool to tertiary level. She now lectures in the Education Faculty at the Mt Gravatt Campus of Griffith University to primary and secondary music specialists, as well as primary preservice generalists teachers. She is also co-convenor of the Master of Teaching program for International Students at Griffith. She is the current secretary of AARME.

Dr Georgina Barton is a music educator interested in innovative and inclusive practice. She has experience in a diverse range of music cultures and includes this experience into her music teaching. She currently works with Education Queensland and Griffith University.

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### Table 1: Description Of Schools: as provided by teachers

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<th>SCHOOL</th>
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