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Music Education

Mark Sheridan and Charles Byrne

—Prior to the 1980s the music curriculum consisted of class-singing, sol-fah deciphering and music appreciation. Typical resources were the piano, the Curwen modulator, numerous sets of song and sight-reading books (to suit single gender class groupings) and a record player. More enlightened teachers would have some percussion instruments or recorders in the classroom and, from the 1970s, the odd guitar. The Scottish Examination Board ‘O’ Grade examination at the end of year 4 was designed to be overtaken by pupils who had expertise on an instrument or voice to the equivalent of Associated Board Grade 5, tuition on which was given outwith the classroom while the teacher concentrated on historical study, rudiments and analysis. Such elitism fuelled growing disillusionment in pupils and many teachers who experienced a different world of music in their private lives (Witkin, 1974). Significant and effective change came in 1978 with the publication by the Scottish Education Department of the highly controversial Curriculum Paper 16, *Music in Scottish Schools*. This was the dividing line between past practices and future developments which radically changed the way in which music was taught and which clearly focused music teachers’ and educators’ energies and ideas. It encapsulated many of the ideas and innovations which had been forming in Britain through the work of

Paynter and Aston (1970), Witkin (1974) and in the USA since the 1960s (Choksy et al., 1986) and placed them into a Scottish context. This provided the impetus for a root and branch overhaul of the curriculum which would reshape music in the classroom into an action-based experience, open to all children, regardless of their musical or academic ability. In the contexts of both primary and secondary schools, Curriculum Paper 16 recommended syllabus content and teaching and learning strategies, the review of assessment approaches and most significantly, staffing, resource and accommodation requirements to enable 'music for all' to be implemented. These recommendations gave teachers and headteachers the tools and impetus to make demands on local authorities to fund the developments appropriately.

Curricular overhaul

The next ten years was a time of radical change in the classroom, of experimentation with different types of music and alternative approaches to teaching and learning against a backdrop of serious industrial unrest and anxiety for teachers. Practical music-making activities were introduced as pupils engaged in ensembles of pitched percussion instruments, recorders and guitars for the first time. 'Creative music' experiments were developing in schools and teachers were genuinely seeking a positive way to enliven and brighten the musical diet of their pupils. A Grand Central Committee on Music oversaw a number of national courses for teachers and educators and produced numerous 'Occasional' papers and other texts written by practising teachers which raised awareness of new teaching techniques and practical approaches in the classroom. These papers were disseminated to all secondary schools, colleges and universities and enabled a broad

ranging debate to take place. Following the recommendations of the Munn and Dunning Reports in 1977, the SEB in consultation with the Scottish Education Department began the task of redesigning the curriculum at the hub: the reframing of the old 'O' Grade examination. The Standard Grade Arrangements in Music document (SEB, 1988) was the distillation of this process, in which the aims of practical music-making for all pupils was enshrined. Performing, inventing and listening, taught within an integrated, conceptual framework, represented a very different approach to the curriculum, while a criterion referenced assessment strategy based on these ensured that pupils were rewarded for their positive attainments rather than their failings and shortcomings.

Controversy, however, raged as it had done in 1978. Teachers were unhappy about assessment for all pupils on two instruments (in both solo and group performance which were included as separate components), the necessity to teach across a wide range of abilities in the same classroom, and the compulsory teaching and assessment of inventing. The latter was the most contentious area of the new curriculum and one which would remain so, despite the rationale for its inclusion in the curriculum: 'Inventing develops ideas principally through imaginative response ... It offers pupils a training in discrimination and perception and in the words of the Munn Report provides for "deep imaginative satisfaction"' (SEB 1988, p. 10). The members of the working party that produced this report and other revisions to the curriculum continued to ensure the presence of inventing in the syllabus. Parallel to the developments in Standard Grade, modularised SCOTVEC courses created a similar diet of music courses for students at colleges of Further Education, and some schools, based on a building block approach.

The elements of music could therefore be studied separately and assessed by means of diaries and recorded attainment strategies rather than by examination.

The result of all of these changes was the rapid growth of numbers of young people taking music and the transformation of the music department's largely classical sound-world to one which included folk, rock, pop and jazz. The multi-instrumental nature of the classroom activities and the mixed ability range of the pupils made further demands on music teachers, many of whom were ill-prepared to deal with the new order. Consequently, a Central Support Group in Music (1986), set up under the direction of the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, in collaboration with local authorities, was directed to produce a significant body of materials to aid teachers. Both curricular and staff development materials gave teachers at least the basis on which to plan and implement the new course. A guiding principle of these developments was to ensure that the philosophy was embraced and that an integrated, practical approach was achieved.

PHILOSOPHY AND PEDAGOGY

It is likely that the innovative teachers in the 1970s and early 1980s, a number of whom were architects of Standard Grade, were unaware of some of the precedents which had been set in creating an integrated curriculum. The authors would assert that Comprehensive Musicianship would appear to be the main, if somewhat indirect, influence on the Scottish framework. Comprehensive Musicianship grew from three significant developments in the USA: the Young Composer's Project (1959);

Contemporary Music Project (CMP) for Creativity in Music Education (1963); and a subsequent seminar at Northwestern University in 1965. The fundamental aim of the first two projects was to enhance and develop the teaching of contemporary music in the American classroom, but the event at Northwestern University refocused the direction towards a broad based, all-encompassing, inclusive music curriculum. David Woods (1986) writes: 'A CM approach to music study from preschool through university advocates that students develop personal musical competencies through a balance of experience in':

Performance: reading and recreating music written by a composer

Analysis: describing the music through perceptive listening

Composition: understanding and utilising compositional and improvisational techniques. (in Choksy et al.,1986, p. 110)

_Given that the new curriculum has its origins in such a well-founded philosophy, it is surprising that the approach to curriculum development in Scotland has been somewhat parochial. While teachers and educators would have been well aware of, and to some extent practiced in the classroom approaches of Kodaly, Orff and Jacques Dalcroze, the tendency has been to assimilate and draw on these approaches and philosophies within the individual classroom. This has created a colourful national picture, but one which is hard to pin down to a particular approach or philosophy. It is probable that, faced with such a sea of change in the last twenty years, hard-pressed teachers have ignored or dismissed debate on the philosophy and basis of the curriculum in favour of quick fix

remedies designed to help them cope with the needs of the classroom (Byrne & Sheridan, 2001). It is undeniable, however, that the philosophy exists. Now that teachers have implemented the difficult changes required of them, they may be better placed to address some of the broader educational issues which would doubtless support understanding of the processes in which they are involved.

Framework and progression

Having set the cornerstone of the new curriculum in Standard Grade, the creation and articulation of the Revised Higher (1990) and Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (1992) reinforced the integrated approach, while a greater degree of choice and specialisation gave students the freedom to develop skills and interests best suited to their own aspirations. This curricular choice was possible through selection of extension work in one of the three elements while maintaining core provision for the other two. Performing predominated pupils' selection at these levels of study, while listening and inventing appeared to be less popular although still present in the pupils' experience. This integrated building block approach enabled the music education community to deal with the task of realignment demanded by two further national initiatives: the far reaching 5–14 National Guidelines on Expressive Arts (SOED, 1992) and the Higher Still development programme (1995–8). While 5-14 addressed the primary school curriculum and the necessity to more effectively bridge the gap to secondary, Higher Still re-framed and re-labelled the ladder of progression created by Standard Grade, Revised Higher and Certificate of Sixth Year Studies. These developments created further challenges for teachers. Despite the heavy handed nature of the 5-14 report and the contrived nature of

its language, the programmes of work and the assessment strategies paved the way for possible articulation with existing provision.

The Higher Still initiatives gave teachers and educators the opportunity to revisit some of the issues which arose during the process of curricular overhaul in the 1980s. Literacy and the study of rudiments, for a long time areas of controversy (deemed to be means to ends in the new approaches in 'S' Grade), have been addressed in Higher and Advanced Higher levels. Similarly, effective preparation of able pupils for entry to higher education (which seemed to be one of the aims of the original elitist Higher Grade) was for some regarded as a casualty in the new order. Greater collaboration and communication between Higher Education institutions and schools was encouraged to help alleviate some of the challenges in this area. The impressive flourishing since the 1980s of the use of a broad range of highly sophisticated I&CT facilities for performing, composing and recording has greatly expanded pupil access and enhanced achievement in the classroom. The innovations of MIDI, CD-ROM and internet technologies were probably the most significant developments in music in the twentieth century, and while many of their uses and applications still need to be rigorously examined and researched, this revolution has opened up new frontiers and experiences in music for all pupils and teachers. Singing, on the other hand, the most fundamental means of musical expression, has undoubtedly been damaged by rapid change in the classroom. Teachers have argued that the implementation of a largely instrumental curriculum, the reduction in size and the creation of mixed gender classes have created difficulties which have seriously undermined singing in many schools. It may also be true that, as one of the most taxing

aspects of the musical diet, it was easy prey for teachers to expel it from the curriculum. The result, however, is that community and church choirs have suffered in recruitment of young members and despite efforts to address the problem by bodies such as the National Youth Choir of Scotland, the British Federation of Youth Choirs and local authorities, the plight of singing in schools still needs to be addressed.

Assessment

_Highlighted previously as an area of concern, the inventing element is the one which appears to have been least successful in implementation. Research has shown that the Standard Grade examination results between 1991 to 1996 reflected a worrying trend:

Pupil attainment in performing which has traditionally been well taught and learned, with awards at Credit level in Solo ... and Group ... now reaching 63% (from 53%) and 60% (from 45%) respectively. Attainment in listening has been improving steadily ... (45% to 50%). The percentage of pupils achieving grades of 1 or 2 for ... Inventing are the lowest, starting from 36% in 1991 and rising slowly to a peak of 43% in 1996 (Byrne, C. & Sheridan, M. (1998) Music: a source of deep imaginative satisfaction? *British Journal of Music Education*, 15(3), 295-301).

The authors have since examined this phenomenon, outlining and reviewing some potential causes of this inconsistency in attainment. While a number of factors such as teachers' own lack of training in creative music making, the appropriateness of classroom activities and inappropriate assessment criteria may be significant, it is likely that the fundamental problem is the manner in which creativity is assessed. Inventing was included in the assessment process, giving it status and value, in the hope that teachers would embrace the underpinning philosophy of Comprehensive Musicianship and deliver

it appropriately. It may be that this very inclusion compromises the nature of the creative attainment it was designed to measure and that assessment in music needs a radical re-appraisal (Sheridan, M. & Byrne, C. (2002) *The Ebb and Flow of Assessment in Music. British Journal of Music Education*, 19(2), 133-141).

Despite these challenges, more and more young people are voting with their feet and taking up music in school with the result that demand for music teachers and places in higher education courses are greater than in the past. The range of opportunities now available to study all kinds of music is now extensive and confounds the popular myth that curriculum changes of the late 80s onwards would adversely affect the number of musicians entering higher education. The proliferation of college and university courses in popular, rock, jazz and traditional music has created a sustainable structure which supports and nourishes the quality of music making across the country.

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