



ASME NSW

Response to Curriculum Review Consultation

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December 2019

Document tendered by
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Received by
Gareth Perkins
Date: 25 / 11 / 24
Resolved to publish Yes / No

This response is focused on Music in consideration of the Review of the existing NSW curriculum.

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Reforming the content of Curriculum

Objective:

To promote deep learning through a less crowded curriculum, that prioritizes the development of core disciplinary knowledge, conceptual understandings and ways of thinking and working, together with skills in applying these in real world contexts.

Reform direction 1 Creating a less crowded curriculum

The existing NSW curricula for the arts are provided as K-6 Creative arts: Dance, Drama, Music and Visual Arts; Stage 4, Stage 5 and Stage 6 syllabus in each artform with additional syllabi in Music and Visual Arts in Stage 6. The 1992 Education Act mandates the teaching of Music and Visual Arts throughout primary school and through to the end of Stage 4, with other art forms able to be addressed.

ASME would assert that the structure of the Creative Arts curriculum intrinsically demonstrates flexibility, and awareness of the challenges of the crowded curriculum with two art forms mandated and the other two art forms optional. Further, in Years K-6 the current structure of the curriculum does not mandate hours between art forms, rather an allocation of time to “Creative Arts”. This gives teachers flexibility and autonomy in deciding when and what to teach.

The curriculum from K-8 does not dictate content beyond a broad exposure to a variety of musical styles, with the need to address Australian music. We would also attest that this flexibility allows teachers to plan for integrated learning opportunities for students and does not place an onerous burden on teachers.

An observation that may contribute to the question of a crowded curriculum is a teacher’s lack of understanding of what is mandated in a syllabus and what is the suggested content. It is ASME’s observation that teachers are interpreting the suggested content and guidelines as mandated outcomes. It would be helpful for teachers to develop an understanding of what absolutely has to be taught within the Creative Arts and Music syllabus documents and what is included in syllabus documents to assist interpretation.

Music is an art form which builds upon core discipline knowledge. The current syllabi utilises a spiral curriculum where key concepts and ideas are continually revisited in greater depth. The fact that music is organised around five concepts in K-6, and six concepts 7-12 also demonstrates the

prioritisation of deep learning of key understandings. The skills-based nature of music curriculum allows students to connect this understanding to real-world contexts, developing their social, cultural and emotional understanding of the world.

ASME NSW asserts that the current structure of the music syllabi minimises the issue of the crowded curriculum; however, we would question whether teachers and executive have a detailed understanding of the flexibility in the syllabi and are currently over-interpreting content guidelines as mandatory content.

Reform direction 2 Promoting deep understanding

The framework of the NSW music syllabi positions them uniquely to promote deep understanding. Learning occurs through utilising an integrated approach to the teaching of musical skills and knowledge. As mentioned above the music syllabi are organised around key conceptual ideas (Duration, Pitch, Texture, Dynamics and Expressive Techniques, Structure, Tone Colour). These are revisited in greater detail throughout schooling from K-12. The understanding of concepts is unpacked through learning experiences which can be summarised into creating music (composing performing) and investigating music (aural responses and theoretical understanding). Further, with syllabi that have broad content guidelines, there is freedom for teachers to tailor their teaching and meet students where they are, ensuring that students are continually developing deep understanding.

ASME NSW believes that these syllabi have distilled essential knowledge. Further, due to the nature of music as an art form, deep understanding develops over time. Thus, Music must be part of the common entitlement for students from Early Stage 1 through to the end of Stage 4 (K-8) with the option for students to continue music studies through to the HSC.

Reform direction 3 Building skills in applying knowledge

ASME NSW attests that the particular skills of creative thinking, collaboration and communicating are implicit to the music syllabi. Further, this is one of the strengths of music as a subject. Skills such as critical thinking and interpreting information are also developed through the music syllabi. However, they do not assume the prominent role of other skills. Even so, music (at the creative arts as a KLA) can lead the way in modelling pedagogy in these skills to other subject areas.

While it is clear that these skills assume more importance in the higher years of schooling, they are skills that can only be developed sequentially, logically and carefully, and they must be modelled in the longer term throughout all school years by teachers with expertise.

Reform direction 4 A common entitlement

ASME NSW argues that Music needs to be part of the common entitlement for every student from K-8 with opportunities for more focused learning in music in the upper years of schooling. ASME NSW urges caution when viewing the learning needs of students who are struggling. There is a large body of research suggesting a holistic approach to education helps students who struggle in the classroom. In particular music instruction is known to enhance auditory processing (often a factor in reading failure) and there are studies demonstrating music could possibly be an effective intervention for students experiencing reading failure (Batley, 2019; Catterall, 2009; Demarin, Morović, & Béné, 2014; Hornickel, Zecker, Bradlow, & Kraus, 2012; Kraus & Anderson, 2015; Overy, 2003; Schlaug, Norton, Overy, & Winner, 2005; Slater, Tierney, & Kraus, 2013; Strait, Hornickel, & Kraus, 2011; Tierney & Kraus, 2013; Zuk et al., 2017). ASME NSW asserts that literacy is a skill that is a common entitlement that needs to be addressed in all KLAs. Again, Music instruction is a particularly useful remediating tool for students experiencing difficulty with reading. Music is also a powerful tool for helping students through social and emotional development. As an inherently social subject area, which is largely concerned with communicating emotions, it has a significant place in enabling students to reach their full potential in social and emotional development (Brown, Garnett, Velazquez-Martin, & Mellor, 2018; Hallam, 2010; Kraus & White-Schwoch, 2017; Osborne, McPherson, Faulkner, Davidson, & Barrett, 2016).

Importantly, the current music syllabi incorporate the study and appreciation of Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories. Music is a useful tool in both storytelling and teaching language. It is a powerful tool in this context (Busse, Jungclaus, Roden, Russo, & Kreutz, 2018).

It also needs to be acknowledged that the senior school Music Syllabus has a secure connection to the creation of meaningful projects, which allow students to pursue their interest and connect their learning to their own real-world context. Some would argue that the Extension music syllabus is entirely project-based and it is impossible to complete either the Music 1 or Music 2 syllabus without engaging in a major project. Music is a subject area which an instructional approach designed allows students to develop knowledge and skills through engaging projects set around

challenges and problems they may face in the real world. The study of Music brings together for the student inquiry learning, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity.

Reforming the structure of Curriculum

Objective:

To facilitate targeted teaching by reorganizing syllabuses into a sequence of attainment levels to support teachers in establishing where individuals are in their learning, meeting individual learning needs, and monitoring whether students are on-track with year-level expectations and to meet the standards expected of every student by the end of school.

Reform direction 5 Creating a more flexible curriculum

ASME NSW asserts that the music curriculum is flexible enough to allow teachers to make decisions about what to teach and when to teach it. One of the strengths of the syllabi are the open-ended outcomes. For example:

Stage 4 outcome 4.1

performs in a range of musical styles demonstrating an understanding of musical concepts

Stage 1 outcome Mus 1.1

Sings, plays and moves, to a range of music, demonstrating an awareness of musical concepts. (Board of Studies NSW, 2000)

These outcomes, whilst aimed at students seven years apart in age, demonstrates the flexibility inherent in the music syllabus. It can be seen that the main outcome here is for students to perform music in an age-appropriate manner, in a range of styles, and through this to connect to the musical concepts. These outcomes are not overly prescriptive, and rather provide a frame of reference for teachers. The frame of reference is further informed by stage or foundation statements. Again stage statements are not overly prescriptive and allow the full range of students to achieve the outcomes in an appropriate manner. For example, the Stage 3 Foundation statement

is the first statement to mention notation (Board of Studies NSW, 2000). However, the system of notation is not specified, nor is the depth of notational understanding prescribed.

Music is a subject where teachers are continually enabling students to learn at their own pace and level of development. It is not uncommon for a music teacher to have several students in a classroom who have had years of private music tuition and many students whose only exposure to music education is through their classroom experience. The current syllabus framework allows teachers to extend students who require challenging and relevant learning experiences and at the same time facilitate the learning of students who require further support.

Reform direction 6 Restructuring the curriculum

As previously mentioned, the music syllabi are particularly open-ended. The outcomes are broad and skill-based (students will learn about music concepts through performing...students will learn about musical concepts through composing). Further, while the teacher in the classroom is the expert who is seen as imperative to a student's success (Lorenza, 2018), the nature of music education is collaborative. It is not uncommon to have students working at many different levels of attainment, and effectively at many differing syllabus levels. Music teachers are continually dealing with a wide disparity of ability level in the classroom; it is intrinsic to the subject, and the broad, open-ended syllabus outcomes support teachers in this situation. The current situation does not leave students being told they are working to "lower outcomes", they are just given alternative pathways for meeting the outcomes in the classroom.

Reform direction 7 Setting high expectations

ASME NSW asserts that prescribing an "attainment level" to the arts is counter-intuitive. It would lead to a subject that is often seen as a "safe haven" for students to be seen as assessment focused. This is counter to the current research on intrinsic motivation and its impact on learning (Brown et al., 2018; McPherson, Osborne, Barrett, Davidson, & Faulkner, 2015; West, 2012). ASME NSW would argue that if a minimum attainment level approach was adopted in Music, it should centre around teacher's judgement and whether students have met outcomes. This approach guarantees the flexibility of learning and teacher autonomy in shaping the classroom learning. Music is a subject that frequently sees students working at extremely high levels – an absence of attainment levels leaves achievement open to students, removing any sense of ceiling.

Furthermore, ASME NSW would be concerned to see attainment levels across all KLA's become a pseudo test. In the era of NAPLAN (and general high stakes testing) there has been pressure on teachers to meet minimum standards. However, this has not translated into an improvement in essential skills such as literacy and numeracy (Bolton, 2019). Furthermore, there is a body of research suggesting that arts-rich environments promote learning in other KLAs (Ewing, 2019; Graham et al., 2002; Ewing, 2012; Guthrie & Cox, 2001; Sala & Gobet, 2017; Staveley, 2014; West, 2012; Young, 2018), students not meeting attainment levels in other subjects should still be able to access the common entitlement of music education. It is a fallacy to suggest that there is only one way to ensure high expectations in a KLA.

Reform direction 8 Monitoring whether learning is on-track

The idea of being "on track" is an interesting one for music students. While it is helpful to monitor a student's growth and improvement over time, and there are essential skills required for successful completion of stage 6 courses, it is complicated to quantify accurately. Furthermore, particularly in primary school, music is a subject where teachers often feel ill-equipped to teach. There are inherent difficulties in asking teaching staff to identify whether a student is "on-track" or not. There is also a vast disparity in the resourcing of Music Education across different schools and systems which impacts the levels of achievement and how this is expressed. The NSW music syllabus is currently written with an understanding of these dynamics. ASME NSW asserts that for the idea for monitoring whether learning is "on track" in Music, considerable changes would have to be made to the provision of preservice music education training for K-6 teachers. Quality teaching is the most crucial resource for students who are regarded as 'behind' and this can only be achieved through quality teacher training.

Reform direction 9 Ensuring continuity of learning

Learning in music occurs on a continuum and is heavily influenced by both the open-ended syllabus outcomes and content. Music is not a streamed subject area, and ASME would attest that despite the misconception that in stage 6 Music 1 is the "easier" course and Music 2 the more rigorous, these courses provide for students to focus upon different skills and repertoire in the Stage 6 context. At every stage of schooling, it is implicit within the music syllabus to view students as being at different points on the same continuum.

Reform direction 10 Assessing and communicating learning

ASME NSW asserts that the current system of reporting does communicate the points that students have reached in their long term progress in their area of learning. We would suggest that perhaps the language of the common grade scale needs to be altered. Most teachers would attest that a Basic or Limited grade (D or E) indicates that a student is not on track, and that a Sound or C indicates that a student is “on track”. This needs to be communicated more clearly to parents.

Reforming the Senior school curriculum

Objective:

To ensure every student is well-prepared for further learning, life and work through rigorous senior secondary courses that integrate knowledge, skills and attributes and prioritises both theory and application in learning.

Reform direction 11 Creating a more integrated curriculum

ASME supports the idea of a more integrated curriculum. Music is intrinsically a subject that has academic and vocational aspects to it. Further the current VET Entertainment syllabus sits well alongside the music curriculum with points of intersection. It is interesting to note that the Music Teacher often delivers the Entertainment syllabus. Despite this, ASME would oppose combining of the Entertainment and Music syllabi. They have different focal points and allow students to concentrate upon different aspects of their learning. It is impossible to study music without demonstrating that practical activities are supported by underpinning knowledge. The music courses primarily model the transfer and application of knowledge through practical activities.

Reform direction 12 Recognizing progress and attainment

ASME NSW would attest that the end of school Music written examinations examine how students think about music, rather than rote learned knowledge. A strength of the music syllabi is the strong thread of formative assessment throughout the course. This is best seen in the emphasis on portfolio-based assessment of compositions and musicology essay – where the emphasis is on the process (Board of Studies NSW, 1999).

In a rich culture of learning about music dominated by a recursive, spiral curriculum, ASME feels it would be a backwards step to reduce learning to a sequence of modules. Preferably, we would argue for further teacher autonomy in selecting content and making judgements regarding student's work. Music is a highly subjective area when it comes to teachers and their students. We would argue for the retention of a measure of external assessment at the end stages of schooling, in order to moderate and ensure consistency of assessment at the final stage of schooling.

One of the most significant flaws in the current music syllabi is that there is an inequity of resources which impacts student learning outcomes. For example, in the Music 2 course, where there is a

mandatory composition component (worth 15 marks), well-resourced schools can employ composers in residence. This inflates this area of the course and the students with access to these resources are better placed to achieve higher marks. ASME would argue for the structuring of examinations that allow equity of access. Further, we attest that the current music examinations avoid regurgitation of content and could act as a model for other subject areas.

Reform direction 13 Introducing a major project

The music syllabi currently provide a model for major projects. While projects are completed by individual students, many students complete these projects in a culture of collaboration, where they share their progress frequently with their peers. ASME would suggest that the classroom environment is the best way to promote collaboration; however projects would be best assessed individually.

The access or lack of access to resources is a concern in music education. However, with consistent offerings of teacher professional development, particularly in rural areas, this can be minimized.

Reform direction 14 Redefining learning areas

ASME NSW does not support the suggested re-definition of learning areas in the case of creative arts. The suggested new title, “Visual and Performing Arts and Entertainment” is problematic on many counts which are discussed below:

- One strand of the creative arts KLA is named in the title, thus elevating this subject above the others.
- Music is far more than a “performing art”. It is about creative expression, composition, improvisation and conceptual understanding of music. Any title needs to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of Music.
- Entertainment sounds like an “add on”.

To truly capture the nature of the KLA ASME supports retaining the current title “Creative Arts”. This captures the broader scope of Music (and the other art forms). We support the inclusion of Entertainment in the Creative Arts KLA. It needs to be acknowledged that the Entertainment Syllabus is also intrinsically creative and gives students an enormous scope for creative expression. Furthermore, the retention of the title Creative Arts (or amendment to Creative and Performing Arts) reinforces the strong sense of integration between Music, Art, Dance, Drama and Entertainment.

Reform direction 15 Reviewing ATAR

ASME NSW supports a review of ATAR. Considerations of ATAR often result in misguided subject choices and often results in students not choosing creative arts subjects in Year 12. The tertiary entrance rank has become an unhelpful focus of schools and is seen as a measure of a school's success without regard to context (Keddie, 2015).

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