

An Impact Assessment of Instrumental Music Tuition on the musical Progression of Mayor's Music Fund Scholars

by Annie Cartwright

Introduction

I have been associated with the Mayor's Music Fund as a consultant since the end of its first term in 2012. During 2015, the 4 year cycle for the first cohort will be completed. The opportunities that have been created and the progression for many of these youngsters has been significant. I have visited all 32 boroughs and have been privileged to observe a number of scholars at work in their lessons and in various ensembles. I have also met and spoken with senior staff, tutors, Headteachers, scholars, mentors and parents/carers. There is no doubt in my mind about the value and potential of this initiative.

Background

My own involvement in Music Education over some 45 years has been as a teacher, Inspector/Adviser, Head of Music Service and as a Consultant. During this time I and other colleagues in the music profession have been called upon many times to define what the importance of Music Education is. As we witnessed young children engaged in making music vocally and instrumentally almost every day, we were able to see the impact that music had on the progress and development of the youngsters with whom we worked. We were often confounded therefore, by this constant need to justify music on the curriculum.

When pressed to convey my own view, my mantra has always been that:-

Instrumental and vocal musical opportunities should be a 'normal activity' for all youngsters. Music should stand alone and be respected, firstly for the skills it offers as a subject and then subsequently for its impact on other area of the curriculum and life-long skills.

The following contribution from a primary teacher of a school - which has had two Mayor's scholars- expresses the role of music in his school most eloquently and highlights the importance that the school attaches to music in the curriculum.

'Our values of Respect, Excellence and Friendship are constantly being reinforced through the teaching and participation in musical activities. Our children know how to listen actively and show exemplary behaviour when watching and taking part in performance. From frequent exposure to the process of making music our children understand the skills and tenacity of self-evaluation and enthusiasm which are promoted as skills required for life-long learning in all areas.'

Barry Scorgie, Music teacher Jubilee Primary school, Hackney

Moving forward

The picture for music-making is generally more positive to-day than in the past, despite the many changes in the educational picture. Certainly, initiatives undertaken over the past decade have provided greater opportunities for youngsters to be engaged in music activities and to have the chance to learn an instrument. These include the work of Musical Future, Wider Opportunity initiatives, for example, as well as the extensive programmes of Music Services themselves and the dedicated work of schools and music schools across the country.

A number of reports and recent research have served to highlight the strengths but also the areas needed for sustained development in Music Education.

The publishing of the Henley Review in 2010 has been extremely influential in its comprehensive overview on Music Education.

One of the many recommendations that the report makes is in the area of **progression routes**.

He states that it is:

'...vital that clear progression routes be made available to those children who show an aptitude for playing a musical instrument. For the most talented, these progression routes should take them from an initial Wider Opportunities programme, right through to the Music and Dance Scheme.

He goes on to say that:

'..... more focus needs to be applied to helping children to make the journey that is appropriate for their skills from the base of the pyramid towards its peak.

'Making Music' the latest ABRSM report reveals that there is much to celebrate in a British musical landscape,

'More children than ever are now playing a wider variety of musical instruments with the proportion playing leaping from 41% in 1999 to 76% in 2014.'

However encouraging the valuable findings of the report are, it also draws attention to areas of major concern.

'Children from lower socio-economic groups continue to be significantly disadvantaged compared with their peers from more affluent backgrounds. Sustained, progressive music education tends to be the preserve of children born to wealthier parents. The cost of learning to play and of taking lessons is a major barrier and children without access to tuition are significantly less likely to carry on playing.

The role of the Mayor's Music Fund: Aims and Aspirations

The setting up of the Mayor's Music scholarship fund fits strategically into current thinking and recommendations on music education, since they share the aims and aspirations that are arising out of present-day debate.

Specifically, the scholarship fund aims to:-

- *Target youngsters with musical potential.*
- ***Provide financial assistance** for music lessons.*
- *Ensure a dedicated 2 hour programme for all scholars.*
- *Provide **progression routes** for youngsters.*
- *Provide continuity for youngsters at the Primary/secondary **transition phase**.*
- *Form strong **partnerships** with Music Services and other organisations who support music-making in London.*

The scholarship is a pan- London scheme to provide instrumental tuition and ensemble opportunities to youngsters with music potential across 32 inner and outer London boroughs. Currently there are approximately 275 scholars.

The scholars very much reflect the make-up of their local population and areas. The profile includes families who would struggle to meet the costs of musical tuition. There are also youngsters with Special Needs, Looked After children, children with a disabled parents, and single parent families.

Musical promise is targeted and supported at an early stage, thus allowing for development over the four year period.

The current requirements for the scholarship programme are:-

The minimum requirement for the weekly programme is 2 hours which include an instrumental lesson and an appropriate programme within the infrastructure of each music service.

- *An individual or group lesson for 20 – 30 mins.*
- *A range of ensemble opportunities for scholars which strengthen and add to musicianship e.g. orchestras, wind and string groups, guitar ensembles etc.*
- *Theory classes to underpin the practical work.*
- *Other activities such as choir, theory and composition or musicianship classes.*

All the related activities are helping to underpin musical skills and aid musical development over a four year period.

The observation cycle.

- In total some **80 whole or part sessions** have been observed over a two year cycle. Most observations were undertaken jointly with a member of the Music service.
- Lessons have included a mixture of individual, group or paired lessons and various orchestras, wind and string ensembles and bands
- Lessons and ensembles take place at school, in a Saturday Music school or mid-week Music Centre.

Observation totals

- 52** individual, paired or group lessons were observed
- 26** orchestral/ensemble sessions were observed
- 14** i.e. theory, choir, musicianship

The standards of scholars vary from those working towards an examination to those now reaching the higher Grades 6 and upwards.

Teaching

There were no poor lessons observed. Most lessons gave scholars a positive opportunity to develop their skills and understanding of music. Some tutors were given feedback from their Music Service colleagues where a few suggestions on how to adapt their repertoire, or vary the pace or tasks -but most of the scholars observed were benefitting from good or better lessons.

The impact and the quality of teacher/scholar relationship remains key to the success of good progress in lessons. In the most engaging lessons, teachers were aware of the individual needs of the scholars and were employing the appropriate teaching strategies to move them forward. Tasks offered appropriate challenges. Progress was easy to see in lessons and is also good over the year.

Features of the good teaching observed.

- *Good clear and positive communication skills and relationships with the scholar*

- *A teacher who clearly loves music and enthuses in their work*
- *Repertoire is designed to interest and extend skills as well as motivate students.*
- *Good use of warm-ups to start lessons.*
- *The pace and sequence of the lesson is good and cohesive.*
- *Lesson activities are varied, and include listening, close questioning, call and response, sight reading, teacher modelling etc.*
- *Careful and patient explanations – checking for understanding.*
- *Ensuring the ‘how’ as well as ‘what’ to practice.*
- *Constructive and useful criticism.*
- *Making good reference to prior learning, theoretical understanding, and combining them with musicianship in the lesson.*
- *Promoting challenge positively in lessons.*

Progress: *The impact of the quality of teaching on progress is that:*

- *Progress and improvement is clear in the lesson.*
- *Progress and development is good over the year.*
- *The scholar’s motivation and interest is held and maintained*

OBSERVATION: **Individual Guitar lesson** **Observation time:** 30 mins

Context: This scholar was working towards Grade 1 on guitar when observed. She is described as a highly motivated and diligent student and had been consistently amongst the higher achievers in the group from which she was selected for the scholarship programme.

- *The first thing that impresses is the quality of sound produced on the guitar. The scale of G Major was played clearly and steadily, with a strong and clear tone and with good intonation*
- *The scholar demonstrates really good aural awareness when she is asked to improvise to a backing track. She does this competently, fluently and with a really good sense of timing and phrasing.*
- *A performance of ‘In the Bleak Midwinter’ is preceded by the teacher asking Isabelle to count them in. This she does confidently. Backing tracks are well used and Isabelle is used to playing with an accompaniment.*
- *The Low D on guitar and the use of ‘ostinato’ introduces some new learning and also some revision into the lesson. Isabelle is also asked to conduct in 4-4 time which she does confidently.*
- *The quality of relationships are very positive and with such good knowledge of the student, the pace of the lesson, the probing questioning and the nature of the tasks themselves keep adding continued interest e.g. ‘How many C’s are there in this piece?’ ‘Say the name of the fingering we need to use here etc.’*
- *In a piece called ‘Zoo Blues’ the level of improvisation is really very impressive - confident clear and with an excellent sense of timing and phrasing. The Teacher consults with the students to discover which aspects she finds the most difficult. In this way advice on practise is directly related to this.*
- *The lesson ends with home practice being written down and explained and advice on the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’ to practice is successfully given.*

Summary: This was a really enjoyable lesson of the very highest calibre and content. The quality of the teacher/students relationship was outstanding and contributed to the success and progress of the lesson. There were a number of very positive features throughout-with a range of activities covered most successfully in a 30 mins lesson. A real pleasure to observe!

Scholar: Isabelle

OBSERVATION: Intermediate strings Group
2 violin scholars

Observation time: 35 mins (of a 1 hour session)
No in the group 19.

This session was used as extra rehearsal time for the group to prepare for their performance at the Royal Festival Hall on Monday 30th June.

- *The 'warm up' activities began with a clapping exercise with the ensemble split into three groups. The tutor set the pulse and one group clapped 3 beats to a bar, whilst another clapped 4 with the third group clapping 5 beats. After playing a number of bars, the group would end up absolutely together and they would all call out a given name as they stopped clapping and the sequence ended. This was all accomplished well.*
- *The teacher maintained a good pace. Activities were carefully timed and well balanced.*
- *The work led on effectively to an activity where the instruments replaced the clap – still using the same beats to a bar. Each group had to select a musical technique or effect that they would like to use. One group chose a tremolo effect another chose pizzicato whilst the third chose to play harmonics. The outcome of this exercise was that the effects and the varying beats for each group helped to build an abstract piece of music in which everyone listened closely and worked well together.*
- *Having warmed up and developed their focus, the ensemble then went on to play an arrangement of the Adele song 'Rolling in the Deep' which they will be performing at the Royal Festival Hall on the 30th June.*
- *The sound produced – especially in the upper strings, was very clear and controlled. The bowing was confident and players kept together.*
- *The ensemble produced a good strong sound and the performance overall was very confident and fluent.*

Summary: Overall this was a very good session. The use of warm up activities helped to focus and motivate the group whilst also helping them to work on some of the skills and techniques that they would be using later in the session. The pace was well judged and this helped to maintain the motivation of the group. The two scholars clearly enjoyed this session and were motivated and concentrated throughout. In the brief conversation I had with them, they said how much they enjoy this weekly session and how much they were looking forward to the performance which they were working towards.

Scholars: Shania and Kelly

OBSERVATION: Theory session: Standard: Grade 5.

Theory classes are organised in the centre according to Grade levels. This class was working on Grade 5 material. The group were working on exercises with the teacher, but also making use of the book Music Theory in Practice by Eric Taylor.

- *The class were working on an exercise to identify the chords 1, 11, 1V, and V from a series of melodies.*
- *The group were asked to write out the scale and then add the 3rd and 5th above the relevant chords.*
- *The lesson was taken at a lively pace. Teacher explanations were clear and concise; there was good collaborative work between the teacher and students. Clear step by step guidance helped the class to understand the work.*

- *Emanuel appeared very confident with this method of working out and was able to complete the answers quickly. He was also one of the first to put up his hand to answer questions. For example, he was also able to contribute to questions such as 'Why do we call it root position?' 'What notes are in this chord'?*
- *When the teacher moved on to the inversions of chords. Emmanuel was quick to recognise the 1st or 2nd inversion chords and again was able to answer questions and to complete the exercise successfully.*
- *An interesting and enjoyable session in which it was clear to see that Emmanuel is making progress.*

This was very good session, where there was much achieved. Emmanuel told me that he really enjoys theory and seems to like the challenge of 'finding things out'.

Scholar: Emmanuel

Other activities

When visiting the scholars in a variety of settings in and around the boroughs, it is interesting to note the variety of classes on offer. These include musicianship, choir, various ensembles, creative music making classes, practical theory etc.

OBSERVATION: Choir: 20 mins of a 45 min session.

Part of a choir session rehearsing 'Non Nobis Domine' from the 'Little Jazz Mass' by Bob Chilcott. There is no selection for this choir, but the standard of singing was very good indeed.

Students' folders contained a varied choice of music scores. I noted Bobby McFerrin, Purcell 'Come Ye Sons of Art' as well as the Chilcott work mentioned above.

- *Although the repertoire was work in progress, the part singing was gaining in confidence and the choir made a really good full and musical sound.*
- *It was good to see boys taking part and singing confidently together.*
- *Students were all working from scores and reading music.*
- *The part writing in this piece contains some challenges and the group were rising to them successfully.*
- *I saw Francis, William and Bryony who were all taking an active part.*

There was really good support from the three teachers leading the session who were all enthusiastic, but clearly had high expectations of the group. There was no time wasting and even in a relatively short period of time, it was possible to hear some progress being made. This was another interesting and enjoyable singing session – sadly all too brief! Once again, the quality of enthusiasm and support from the tutors contributed to the success of the session.

Participating Scholars: Bryony, Francis, Melika, William, Chom

OBSERVATION: Keyboard/Musicianship/Theory Class 30 Mins

This was an impressive session, which was highly enjoyable. It is interesting to have the three scholars working together learning the keyboard, but also absorbing the rudiments of theory in a practical and meaningful way.

- *Each scholar worked quietly on their individual pieces using earphones.*

- *The teacher spent time with each scholar in turn, listening to their work and suggesting ways to improve, asking questions, drawing on the students' prior learning.*
- *She shared a very positive relationship with the scholars and this provided a very productive atmosphere for the lesson.*
- *The teacher then invited the three scholars to sit round the piano and work together. She questioned the group on how they would recognise tones and semi-tones.*
- *She then went on to ask them to point out where the semi-tones were on the C major scale*
- *Using this method for different scales the teacher probed to see whether the scholars understood when a sharp is needed (G major) or a Bb. in the key of F..... etc.*

This was a very worthwhile use of lesson time as the teacher drew attention to theoretical aspects of music through a practical focus on keyboard and piano. The scholars were all involved and answered questions enthusiastically. Theory books were used to make notes and as a reference point. This was a good ending to a very interesting lesson. There was a positive teacher/student relationships and the group lesson dynamic worked well. Overall this was a very good lesson, which was purposeful and interesting for the students and one where clear progress is being made.

Scholars: Maria, Daniel and Lucy (working together)

The Impact of Other factors That Influence the Scholarship Programme

Performance opportunities

Scholars have access to a wide range of performance opportunities at school, weekend music centres, special Music Service projects, and one day events. They are also given numerous invitations to attend professional concerts through the Mayor's Music Fund contacts.

The impact of being involved in these opportunities have been voiced in a number of End of Year reports where teachers, mentors and families comment on how their child has developed confidence through this kind of involvement. Scholars too are keen to acknowledge their increased confidence and enjoyment in performing.

The role of the Mentor

Much has been written about the need to engage families and schools in a collective support of musical progress for students.

The scholarship rightly places great importance on the communication of all parties involved in the scholar's four year programme. This level of support is vital in ensuring that all parties are involved in the scholarship process and will contribute to the annual reporting process.

The Mentor is the liaison between the scholar, family, music tutor, school and the Music Hub or Music Service staff. They have responsibility for ensuring that the musical and personal needs of the scholars are being met. The impact of good mentoring is ensuring that there is a good overview of the individual and a smooth system of collaboration with tutors families and schools.

It is evident that Music Services are seeing this role as an increasingly important one both in terms of organisation and administration. Where mentors play an active role in supporting the scholarship programme within the Music Service- potential problems appear to be dealt with reasonably quickly.

Parent/carer support

Enlisting the support of parents/carers is essential to the programme. Music Service staff and Mentors work hard to ensure good communications with families, since they recognise the impact of

parental/carer support, which is essential to the scholarship programme. When the scholar is supported with their lessons, practice and performance, it makes a big difference to their progress and motivation.

Scholars Withdrawal from the Scheme

Given the wide starting points, young ages and diverse backgrounds of the scholars, the percentage of scholars who have withdrawn to date is in the region 11. 25%. The reasons for withdrawal are as follows

- *poor attendance*
- *insufficient progress,*
- *the scholar has been accepted at a music school*
- *family problems*
- *death in the family, the scholar has moved out of the borough*
- *lack of parental support*
- *transferred to secondary school and lost interest*

Regrettable though it is, it is true that when targeting youngsters of this particular age range, not all will sustain their interest and motivation in tuition. Competing peer pressures, the anxiety of school work and competing interests, will vie with youngsters for their time and attention.

In many instances it has been possible to replace them with other scholars and this has ensured that the scholarship funding continues to be put to the best possible use.

The Future

It would be true to say that there will always be a need for additional input to support instrumental tuition, since to rely on a single income source is not sound in the current economic climate. The cost implication of music tuition for many will be a constraint.

The Mayor's Music Fund has made a significant difference to a number of youngsters, who have been given the chance to learn and develop their music skills. In order to draw on this musical initiative, it would be sensible to support a scheme which has been tried, tested and which is proving to be successful.

The Mayors Scholarship fund could usefully be rolled out as a national model, since it would offer a powerful entry point and a chance to succeed for a significant number of young students with Musical potential.

.....'If we are to realise the potential of music, each and every one of us needs to stand up for quality music education. We must agree what best practice looks like and emulate it, whilst, of course, taking full account of our differing local contexts.'

(Richard Hallam 'Actions, Attitudes and Expectation's MEC blog November 2014)