

Focus

**The 'generalist' versus the 'specialist' in the teaching of the
performing arts in primary schools**

**PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL LEAVE
REPORT
March, June, July 2006**

Neil W Shroff

MNZM BEd HDipTchg LTCL ALCM

Principal
Point View School
Howick
New Zealand

PREFACE

In 2000 the Ministry of Education introduced into schools a new curriculum document in the performing arts. Every state school in New Zealand is now expected to provide programmes in dance, drama and music to all students.

This study considers who should be responsible for the delivery of the such programmes and examines the debate of the 'generalist' versus the 'specialist' in the teaching of the performing arts. Can a general classroom teacher be expected to provide quality programmes in all the performing arts and is the growing trend to employ 'specialists' in the areas of dance, drama and music a positive move? These issues, and what facilities and resources are necessary to enable quality programmes to be delivered, are addressed in my study.

This study looks at the programmes being offered in the performing arts in twelve primary schools, four in the UK and eight in New Zealand, both state and independent.

INTRODUCTION

'The arts develop the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of human experience. They contribute to our intellectual ability and to our social, cultural, and spiritual understandings. They are an essential element of daily living and of lifelong learning'.

The above statement is placed at the beginning of the 2000 document entitled *'The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum'*. This document divided the performing arts curriculum into the three distinct yet related areas of *dance, drama and music*.

My sabbatical provided me with the opportunity to explore the following;

- * Which provides the best quality programmes for primary school aged students - the general classroom teacher or the specialist in the performing arts?
- * What facilities and resources are needed to provide quality programmes?
- * How currently are teacher trainees trained to provide quality programmes in the performing arts?

I was fortunate to visit eight schools in New Zealand and four in Britain. I have also surveyed eighteen schools in my local principals' association. My report is based on my observations at the schools visited and my discussions with the principals and relevant staff working in the performing arts. I wish to thank all concerned for their warm welcome and the generosity of time given to me at on every occasion.

The United Kingdom Experience

The Setting

All of the schools visited in the United Kingdom were independent, with fee paying students. Two of the schools were for boys only and the other two were co-educational. Size range was from 240 to 450 students with class average size of 15. The largest classes consisted of 20 students and the lowest was 12. All schools catered for students from age 5 to 13 and all schools also had a pre-school department.

Music

The schools visited all had specialist teacher or teachers for the teaching of music with the use of such teachers from year three onwards. All schools had a dedicated music suite with a number of practice rooms attached and three of the schools also had a music laboratory. Two other schools were involving their older students (years 7 & 8) in composing and had ICT equipment to enable this to be carried. Two schools also had a professional recording studio.

Not only did all classes receive music instruction but the majority of the students in years 3 - 8 learned an instrument from a visiting itinerant teacher. The lessons were given in school time with a very involved timetable that ensured that no student missed the same class lesson more than once during a term. In one school 95% of students learned at least one instrument, with especially musical children learning two or three different instruments. Learning an instrument was seen as the most integrated and purposeful way in which to learn to read music.

Because of the large number of students playing instruments all schools had at least one school orchestra and in two cases an A & B team. Various ensembles such as string groups, swing band and jazz groups were in operation. These groups displayed a very high standard of performance. All schools had at least a senior and junior choir and at two schools students provided for choristers to sing in a chapel or cathedral. Once again these groups had all reached a very high standard. Annual music/drama productions were of a semi professional nature allowing for all students to participate in a variety of ways.

Each head of the schools visited expressed full support and need for the specialist teacher in music and believed that the 'spin off' from music programmes of a high order was an increase in students' ability to concentrate and persevere in all areas of the curriculum; an increase in self discipline was specifically mentioned by two of the headmasters.

It was noted that parents had expectations that quality music programmes would be delivered by teachers well qualified and experienced in music teaching. It was also noted that students appeared to also have high expectations of music

programmes of quality with many opportunities to learn and perform music through a variety of experiences.

All schools visited were prepared to engage a specialist and in some cases two were employed - one with responsibility for choral music and the other for instrumental studies.

All schools included substantial budgets for resources to carry out innovative and challenging programmes.

Dance/Drama

Of the four schools visited in the UK one had a drama/dance specialist who was responsible for class lessons throughout the school from year three upwards and for overseeing annual drama/music productions and other drama and dance festivals.

In all the other UK schools a full time member of the staff with particular ability or interest in drama/dance was assigned the responsibility of the delivery of these areas of the curriculum. This was done through class release in order to take the specialisation. This role was often shared by two teachers. Two of the schools had a specific drama facility, the other two schools used their hall/gym for drama/dance instruction.

Most programmes were stand alone and little integration with other areas of the curriculum was noted. Headmasters reported this as a most satisfactory arrangement and allowed for some integration, especially in drama, with other curriculum areas. In the one case when there was a full time drama/dance specialist, the annual production reached semi professional status.

The New Zealand Experience

The Setting

Eight schools were visited in New Zealand. Three of these were independent schools with fee paying students; five schools were state funded schools. Eighteen other state schools were surveyed to find out how widespread was the employment of specialists in the performing arts.

Music

The three independent schools visited all employed at least one full time music specialist and in two cases a number of music teachers were employed. All schools had a very full and extensive music programme and one, Kings' School, in Auckland, has an exceptional programme, comparable with any programme seen in the UK.

All these schools have a large number of students learning instruments, with a mix of both individual and class lessons. A variety of instrumental ensembles and choral groups are available for students as well as class programmes. Music staff were very involved in music and annual performance productions.

All schools visited had very good music facilities and equipment and were well funded by Boards. In general, the staffing and programmes offered in the New Zealand independent schools were very similar to those seen in the UK. The standards of participation and performance were of a high calibre.

There was a much greater variance in the state schools visited and surveyed. The two intermediate schools visited both chose to employ a full time music specialist. This person was responsible for class programmes and for the operation of a school choir and instrumental group. In one large primary school a director of performing arts was employed to oversee the music and drama programmes. In another large school, a music specialist was employed on a part time basis for class music, choir and instrumental group.

Of the 18 schools surveyed half had no specialist music teacher, either full or part time. Of the three intermediates surveyed one employed two specialists and the others had one designated music teacher. These schools were able to provide full music programmes and choirs and orchestras. Six schools employed a music specialist on a part time basis.

The schools which had no specialist teachers relied on the interest of a class teacher or a parent to provide the expertise to operate a choir and instrumental group. Limited music teaching was provided by the class teacher.

Nine schools have a programme of visiting itinerant teachers but these programmes are much more limited than those in independent schools in NZ or the UK.

Drama/Dance

In the independent schools visited in New Zealand two had appointed a director of performing arts who had the oversight of all programmes in music, drama and dance. In the other school drama/dance was taken by the class teacher but with a lead teacher to support and give advice.

In the other schools three intermediates had full-time specialists in drama/dance whilst all other school relied on the interest of class teachers to take these areas. Once again, King's School in Auckland operates an impressive drama programme.

Few schools in New Zealand have specific facilities for dance/drama. The independent schools, intermediate schools and two other schools used their specific arts centre for drama/dance programmes. Classrooms or halls were used in all other cases.

In a few cases attempts were made to integrate drama and dance programmes with other parts of the curriculum, but generally they were stand alone programmes.

In all programmes in the performing arts observed it was very apparent that the provision of suitable facilities was of significance. All principals reported that without certain spaces etc many of the performing arts programmes would be very difficult to operate. In the schools where high quality work was being carried out, the provision of music suites, practice rooms, and large spaces for drama and dance were regarded as essential. Music also required specific equipment and other resources.

Discussions with Staff

The UK perspective;

I held full discussions with heads and relevant staff at the four schools visited. All heads believed that music programmes in particular required specifically trained and experienced staff to enable high quality teaching and learning to take place in school programmes. Both heads and teachers agreed that many classroom teachers with little or no training in music avoided teaching music, mainly through lack of confidence and the necessary skills.

In one school the head and staff believed that a drama specialist was an added advantage but not necessary for the inclusion of high quality programmes in drama. In the other three schools staff believed that quality programmes were present through the interest and training of classroom teachers. These schools were keen to integrate drama with other areas of the programme as well as offering stand alone drama classes.

No school visited had a dance specialist and staff interests through drama or physical education staff were responsible for high quality programmes. One school did not offer dance programmes of any kind.

The NZ perspective;

In general discussions in New Zealand followed very much the opinions held in the UK. It was generally recognised that specific skills and talents were required to ensure high quality music programmes were in place. There is a growing trend in New Zealand schools for a music specialist to be employed, either on a part time or full time in contributing schools. Other schools rely on volunteers from the community who have the requisite skills. Many general classroom teachers offered very limited programmes in music or none at all. All intermediate and independent schools visited employed at least one full time music specialists.

Drama teaching followed in general the same pattern as the UK with teacher strengths being used to teach drama and dance programmes. One school employed a drama specialist.

Teacher Training in the Performing Arts

Of the thirty practising class room teachers questioned, twelve said that they had received adequate training in their pre service course, twelve stated their training had been inadequate and six stated they had received no training in the performing arts during their pre service course.

Since 1990 teacher training had developed to include a four year degree specialising in music education. It is disappointing that this course has now been abandoned in Auckland with the integration of the College of Education with the University of Auckland.

Before 2005, at the Auckland College of Education all trainees received one semester (36 hours) in each of the performing arts, with an option to specialise in their third year for additional semester in one of the performing arts areas.

Since the college became part of the faculty of Education of Auckland University this has been greatly reduced with no option of additional programmes in the third year of training. It appears this will be further reduced in 2007.

There now seems to be less emphasis placed on actual subject content, especially in the performing arts areas and this regrettable as far as both staff and trainees concerned. Many trainees spoken to feel that they would be unable to operate effective performing arts programmes within their classroom. Many expressed the hope that there were 'specialists' available at the school which employed them.

Many principals and teachers expressed concern that the number of hours spent on curriculum content in teacher training programmes where being reduced.

CONCLUSIONS

From the evidence drawn from the observation of lessons and performances in the performing arts it is clear that a music specialist is required to reach high levels of student participation and learning. Programmes were severely limited when reliance on the general classroom teacher was in place.

Music requires a level of specific skills as well as natural musical aptitude for good teaching to take place. In schools which relied on the class teacher taking music lessons a much more limited standard was reached.

It was also noted that when spaces designed for music teaching and activities were not available music programmes were substantially limited.

Most schools provided high quality drama programmes without a specialist. Extensive use was made of staff interests and strengths with some good professional development to upskill teachers. Whilst some attempts were made to integrate drama in class programmes there were many stand alone programmes of very high quality. Many principals and teachers expressed the opinion that drama teaching did not require the number of very specific skills attached to good music teaching.

At no school visited were dance programmes carried out by a specialist. Once again staff strengths and interest were used to very good effect. Programmes also frequently involved music and physical education specialists.

Designated spaces such as halls, drama/music rooms were deemed necessary for really effective programmes.

Approximately a third of the schools employed a performing arts specialist who took the overall responsibility for the school's music, drama and dance programmes using a variety of specialist and class teacher combinations. In all the schools with high teaching and performance in music, a specialist, either full time or part time, was employed.

In all independent schools in the UK, very extensive programmes in instrumental music were found. To some extent this was mirrored by NZ independent schools with King's School equally that of any UK school. In these schools the findings of Gerard D.Babo in his 2004 study were taken seriously i.e. "that instrumental music programmes have a positive relationship to a student's academic performance with the strongest association occurring in reading and language arts."

Acknowledgement & Appreciation

My thanks go to the following;

United Kingdom

The Headmaster and Staff
of

Caldicott School, Berkshire
Salisbury Cathedral School, Wiltshire
St George's School, Berkshire
The Beacon School, Buckinghamshire

New Zealand

The Principal and Staff
of

Buckland Beach Intermediate School, Bucklands Beach, Auckland
Farm Cove Intermediate School, Pakuranga, Auckland
Gladstone School, Mt Albert, Auckland
Hereworth School, Havelock North
Kings' School Remuera, Auckland
Point View School, Howick, Auckland
Somerville Intermediate School, Howick, Auckland
Wellesley College, Days Bay, Wellington

and to the eighteen schools in the
Pakuranga/Howick area

Martyn Health, Senior Lecturer, University of Auckland

Special appreciation
to

The Board and Staff of Point View School