

## Editorial

There is currently a debate taking place in the UK as to the form and nature of public examinations. This has been caused in part by the influence of the Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA process as it is more commonly known, but also by the notion of a government wishing to take a tough stance on standards. Music has not escaped this attention, and questions are being asked about the type, purpose and role of examinations in music in schools, and the sorts of curricula that are appropriate.

In the *BJME* we have long prided ourselves on bringing descriptions of the world's curricula to wider attention, and so discussions that are happening in the UK should be seen as part of a wider trend, and not simply matters of local concern. So what are these issues? One of the areas that is currently causing a great deal of concern amongst music educators is the notion of what sorts of music are deemed worthy of study, and what should be in a curriculum for pupils at various ages. In the last editorial we looked back at changes in the thirty years that *BJME* has been in existence. We noted a number of these, and although we did not discuss it then, there were debates raging in 1984 concerning the music that could be included in the school curriculum. In 1968, Keith Swanwick had published a book entitled *Popular Music and the Teacher* (Swanwick, 1968). Some years later Shepherd *et al.* (1977) published a book entitled *Whose Music?*, in which they discussed sociological matters appertaining to style and ownership of music in schools. We have come a very long way since then, and the Philosophy and Sociology of music education can now be considered as disciplines in their own right. But we still seem to be at a point of debating whose music matters! There is a long-held belief that Western Classical music is at the pinnacle of musical endeavour, and that all other musics are subservient or inferior. Sometimes this viewpoint is held in such a way that it is not even stated, but simply assumed as a given.

How does this standpoint fit with the 'global village' which has changed the world in so many ways? One of the *BJME* editors (the one writing this section of the editorial) is looking out from his University office window in England's second city over a cityscape of minarets, tower blocks, churches, mosques and temples. Many of the pupils who attend schools within a few hundred yards of the University come from cultures for which Western Classical music is very alien indeed. This does not mean that they should not be introduced to it, far from it, but that its 'otherness' needs to be recognised by those who wish to introduce it.

If education is about, as Malcolm Arnold put it, 'the best that has been thought and said' (Arnold, 1896/1993, preface) then Western Classical music is bound to have a place in the canon of great musical works. Indeed, we wrote in the editorial of issue 30:2 about the problems of identifying such a canon. But music education needs to involve music, and so we, as music educators, need to be constantly asking ourselves what the music is that we should be working on with our young people. Examinations are the public face of education, and, like it or not, in many jurisdictions it is examinations that matter. Neo-liberal governments the world over are vying to prove the superiority of their education systems by the sturdiness of the examination results and test scores produced by their

systems. In music we tread a very difficult path. Axiological concerns tell us that the values espoused by an examination system are highly significant, so the values of the content of music education programme need to be held up to the highest levels of scrutiny. It is here that we can encounter problems. The press have a history of ridiculing attempts to broaden the music curriculum, for instance, this from 1991:

The triumph of popular culture over serious, classical culture seems complete . . . a recent report on music and the National Curriculum suggested that African drumming, reggae and pop music were as important as Mozart . . . Teachers will be free to choose Madonna and M C Hammer over Mahler and Haydn, in spite of government promises . . . (Langan, 1991)

This clearly wears its axiological heart on its sleeve. But for many music teachers, the advice of Mrs Curwen's Piano method of 1886, 'Proceed from the known to the related unknown' (Curwen, 1886, introduction) will be uppermost in their minds. They will get the pupils to Mozart, but they will get there via Madonna.

We want to take our pupils on musical journeys of excitement and discovery, but we know that education is a process, not a destination, and so the route that will be taken needs to be chosen with particular care. These debates will continue, and there are no easy answers – which leads us on to consider the contents of this issue, where we open with David Baker's powerful research on visually impaired musicians. Through their narratives of childhood, he reveals their experiences of lifelong learning and musical participation. The study goes beyond the traditional views found in many cultures of the prevalence of exceptional musician talent amongst those with visual impairment; rather, it focuses on the experiences and challenges of being a musician, in the first instance, as a person with visual impairment. The paper draws attention to important issues about teachers' professional development and pedagogies of inclusion. A second study that explores visual impairment using a qualitative approach comes from the Republic of Korea where Hyu-Yong Park and Mi-Jung Kim explore the experience of musicians with visual impairments learning Braille music. The recommendations from both studies provide important advice for music teachers and policy makers alike.

Whether ideal teaching practices can ever be fully realised is the subject of Marja-Leena Juntunen's paper on teacher educators' visions of ideal teaching practices and pedagogical training within instrumental higher music education in a Finnish context. The individuality of approaches to teaching in higher education is a striking feature, but the author notes that having an individual approach is regarded as a strength of Finnish education. Moreover, teachers' ability to forge an individual style does not appear to be at variance with a conceptualisation of teaching as reflective practice.

From instrumental teaching in the academy to a comparative study of how popular musicians learn, Annie O. Mok provides insight into the practices of informal music learners in Hong Kong. Her study identifies the aspects of such practices that are a common feature of informal learning of popular musicians in the West, while she also identifies practices that are more exclusive to the region and are influenced by the socio-cultural environment of the learners themselves. It would appear that cultural factors in Hong Kong that drive motivation to learn also extend to informal music learning settings.

Finding meaning and making sense to teachers and pupils at primary level is the focus of the final two papers in the current issue. Baldwin and Beauchamp present findings of teachers' views of a revised curriculum in Wales, while Elizabeth Mackinlay presents her reflection and inquiry of the experience of a drumming circle in a primary school using an arts-based research lens in a quest for meaning in a Grade 4 classroom in Australia.

As curricular prescriptions change and evolve, so too do our research questions, findings, resolutions and ongoing debates. Sustaining inquiry is key and, as it has for the past thirty years, *BJME* will continue to be at the heart of these debates, provoking, challenging and disquieting.

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### References

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