**The Arts in Education and Education in the Arts**

**Part 1 – Setting the Scene in England**

Many people are incredibly busy making music with young people. They don’t want to, or don’t have the time to engage in philosophical debate or strategic planning. They just want good materials, lesson plans, assessment tools, schemes of work. A danger is that they miss out on what is happening now on the policy front that will affect their future. For example, have you signed up to the <http://www.baccforthefuture.com/> campaign?

Others can be so interested in policy, philosophical argument, academic papers that they lose touch with what is happening on the ground, day in and day out, the pressures and realities of the real world.

In England, our best music education is world leading. Over the past decade, despite horrendous economic pressures and political challenges, we have improved opportunities for young people. Overall we are more inclusive, have greater diversity. There are examples of the most disadvantaged having their lives transformed, and we still have excellence.

People and organisations are working more effectively together in partnership to meet the needs of young people.

The National Plan for Music Education (NPME) is providing a context for this but the Plan achieves nothing on its own. It is how policy and practice are connected – how the Plan is interpreted and implemented on the ground, at the interface between the professional and the young person that will make it work (or not!).

Nor will the situation change overnight.

And there will still be examples of poor practice.

We can pick fault and criticise, or we can accept that things will never be perfect and do our best to improve things with the tools that are at hand now. The choice is ours.

It is generally agreed that the NPME provides the opportunity for a high quality, inclusive music education, and the Plan gives us the tools and levers to transform policy into practice.

We, as professional teachers, musicians and music educators, have to decide whether we will use those tools.

Key words are “challenge” and “support”. Will we ‘challenge’ unsatisfactory provision and ‘support’ actions that will bring about improvement? Or will we be complicit in perpetuating unsatisfactory provision? Only if each and every one of us takes responsibility for the quality of our contribution to music education will we be able to bring about significant improvements for young people.

Only if we all, collectively, stand up for quality and value for money now, when resources are at their scarcest, will we have the evidence to make the case for continued funding in the short term and increased funding when the economy finally starts to improve.

In 2020 we need to be able to reflect back on the past decade and have something positive to show for our efforts. It is the choices we make now that we determine what that future looks like.

I will be developing these thoughts over the next few weeks. I hope they will be of interest and stimulate debate.