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

**Part 2 – Judgements, Perspectives and Perceptions**

I asserted in Part 1 that the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) gives us the best opportunity we have for improving the quality of music education for all young people in England and that it requires us all to do two things: to challenge what is happening where provision is not good enough; and to support efforts that will lead to improvement. We can make it work and secure the future of music education, or we can contribute to its failure. The choice is ours.

Quality is essential. Everything in the NPME requires quality. There are examples of excellent practice already taking place in England for everything required by the Plan. If you disagree, please read it again and if you still disagree, contact me. (halla@globalnet.co.uk). Let’s discuss it. Hopefully, I will be able to persuade you otherwise – or maybe you will change my mind! It all comes down to judgements, perspectives and perceptions!

When we read something, our understanding is influenced by our past experiences[[1]](#footnote-1). Often assumptions are made that are not actually stated because we see something through a particular lens. Often the divisiveness of ‘either/or’ is assumed rather than the more creative ‘and’, especially at a time when resources are scarce and funding is being cut. But we don’t have to end up with compromise being the worst of all worlds. We don’t have to accept the lowest common denominator. Finding the highest common factor can be far more creative, rewarding and motivating. And not compromising quality is essential if we are to succeed in the long term.

Yes, we do have to provide value for money and reach reasonable numbers of young people. But it is up to us as professionals to ensure that an appropriate balance is struck between quantity and quality. Poor quality is not neutral; it can scar a young person for life. And yes, ***all*** young people are entitled to a high quality music education. So how do we give ***every*** child that entitlement?

First, we must acknowledge that the primary responsibility for music education lies with schools, whether it is a statutory requirement as part of the National Curriculum or as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. Not only is it the school’s responsibility but schools are funded directly to provide this. Head teachers decide how much of their budget to give to music education, to Continuing Professional Development for their staff and to opportunities for the arts in education. Heads are accountable to their Governors. We must challenge and support schools[[2]](#footnote-2) to ensure they are fulfilling their responsibilities adequately before we ‘augment[[3]](#footnote-3)’ those experiences and that funding. Ofsted’s various publications are of enormous value in this respect[[4]](#footnote-4) as are their music inspection plans for the remainder of this academic year[[5]](#footnote-5).

Of course, we still have to come to some agreement around quality in education in the arts. Ofsted’s materials help. But some will argue that that Ofsted is addressing quality in teaching and learning, not artistic quality. Assessing the quality of art is another matter – who judges? And this is where I come once again to ‘judgements, perspectives and perceptions’ and the title of this series of short papers: the arts in education and education in the arts.

I would argue that there is a place for both the arts in education and education in the arts. It doesn’t have to be ‘either/or’. It needs to be ‘and’. But we have to be clear about how the two concepts complement one another. I would also argue that, in education in its broadest sense, there are also roles for the ‘professional artist’, the ‘professional educator’ and the ‘professional artist/educator’.

When I write ‘the arts in education,’ at one extreme I am referring to those opportunities when young people are exposed to what we might express as ‘professional art’ and to ‘artists’ fulfilling their role as ‘professional artists’. The ‘artist’ is not setting out to act as an ‘educator ‘in any way. The ‘artist’ is simply plying their trade as a ‘professional artist’. For example, when students go to a public performance or visit an art gallery. The purpose may be to inspire and motivate. The experience may form part of an educational experience or be intended to build audiences for the future or both. A ‘professional educator’ may have prepared for the event in advance and build on it afterwards, helping the young person to learn from their experience. But essentially, it is the arts in their own right being accessed as part of an overall educational experience.

At the other extreme, when I write ‘education in the arts,’ I am referring to the opportunity for a young person to learn about and participate actively in the arts as part of his or her education, to be able to progress within and across art forms - in music, learning to be a better musician, composer, performer, listener. For some, this will lead to a career including anything from a sound engineer or a music librarian to an arts administrator or a ’professional musician’. For others it will lead to a lifetime’s enjoyment in the arts as a consumer or amateur musician. The key lead professional in this instance is the ‘professional educator‘.

Of course, these are extremes. The skill is recognising how these two concepts complement one another and how they can be interwoven in a meaningful way. Who takes responsibility for what? And what professional development is needed?

And of course, artwork which is part of education in the arts must never be poor quality art just as the learning process should never be poor quality education. High expectations of young people’s artistic achievement, with support to enable them to achieve the highest quality, should always be part of the arts educators’ toolkit. But who judges?

We do. Ofsted, us as professionals, and the young people themselves. If we are to address quality, if we are to challenge and support schools and augment their provision, we have to discuss these issues and come to a shared view about purpose, priorities, value for money and quality. We have to decide when provision is not good enough and how to improve it. These issues will be addressed further in part 3.

1. See also Developing music teacher identities: an international multi-site study. Ballantyne J. Kerchner JL and Arostegui JL in IJME vol 30 no 3 August 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. NPME paragraph 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. NPME paragraph 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/generic-grade-descriptors-and-supplementary-subject-specific-guidance-for-inspectors-making-judgemen>; <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/developing-music-partnerships-schools>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFcwPkG0WC0>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eB6Hhyf16U4>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbYP6G8TNh0>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyPG7BTSdj4>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh64rNwCePM>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHiHra4nIzs&feature=channel&list=UL> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Email halla@globalnet.co.uk for more information on Ofsted’s partnership inspections (Jan to July 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)