

The New Direction of Musical Activities in Primary School in England: A Key to Developing Discourse and Exuberance in the KS1 Classroom

Atsuko Suzuki

As infants grow into children, so their innate musicality develops new forms through their accepting ideas of the culture surrounds them...the process of transformation to an awareness of meaning takes hold in earnest when the child begins formal education
(Malloch and Trevarthen, *Musicality in Childhood Learning*, p. 447)

Abstract: The role of music of primary schools in England has changed dramatically in recent years. The Secretary of State for Education published the new national curriculum framework on 11 September 2013. The Department for Education (DfE) states that most of the content of the new national curriculum will come into force from September 2014. One of the prominent points among these changes is that the previous National Curriculum, which schools have been following since 2002, will no longer be valid after 1 September 2013 and it will no longer be statutory. Key Stage1 (KS1: age 5-7) is a significant stage for children as it involves transition from nursery school to compulsory education. Teachers bear a great responsibility during these years. Music is an invaluable tool for class teachers, not only in terms of teaching but also as a means of helping pupils communicate in other ways. This non-threatening subject helps children who may hesitate to communicate with other pupils by enabling them to express themselves through musical activities. In this essay, the new direction of national curriculum 2014 and the theory of music for KS1 are examined, and practical educational applications of music in the classroom will be considered.

Keywords: primary education in England, music for KS1, teaching practice and method

Introduction

The role of music in primary schools has changed dramatically in recent years. The Secretary of State for Education published the new national curriculum framework on 11 September 2013. The decision to design a new curriculum was taken in the light of certain reservations about the efficacy of the existing guidelines, which were in effect until 2012. According to feedback from the advisory committee appointed by the government, the direction of the old curriculum had deviated from its original purpose:ⁱ

The National Curriculum was originally envisaged as a guide to study in key subjects which would give parents and teachers confidence that students were acquiring the knowledge necessary at every level of study to make appropriate progress. As it has developed, the National Curriculum has come to cover more subjects, prescribe more outcomes and take up more school time than originally intended.

Therefore, the Department for Education (DfE) noted that the national curriculum had to be “[...] slimmed down so that it properly reflects the body of essential knowledge which all children should learn and does not absorb the overwhelming majority of teaching time in schools.”ⁱⁱ The government intends that schools “should have greater freedom to construct their own programmes of study outside the National Curriculum.”ⁱⁱⁱ

In light of the committee’s findings, the DfE stipulates that most of the content of the new and improved National Curriculum^{iv} will come into force from September 2014. One of the prominent points among these changes is that the previous National Curriculum which schools have been following since 2002 will no longer be valid after 1 September 2013 and it will no longer be statutory. Concerning the one year interim of the national curriculum between 2013 and 2014, the DfE stated on 2 August 2013 that:^v

[...] schools are free to develop their own curriculums for music that best meet the needs of their pupils, in preparation for the introduction of the new national curriculum from 2014.

Although DfE states that schools will be free with regard to teaching music for the previously mentioned one year, it seems more difficult for class teachers who are in charge of teaching of their classes to plan lessons. Furthermore, the DfE also stipulates the framework of each subject “[...] so schools have a year to prepare to teach it.”^{vi} This means that schools need to check the contents of the new national curriculum of 2014 and prepare for most subjects in 2013-2014. Will this situation lead to classroom music confusion? How will classroom music changes emerge in this academic year? As the framework of the new national curriculum was published just a couple of months ago and just before the beginning of the new school year, a publication which meets the requirements of the new curriculum is not yet in circulation. Music classes this year, therefore, may use the current publication and revise or make minor changes to activities.

KS1 class is a significant stage for children as it involves transition from nursery school to compulsory education. The teachers’ input is vital at this stage because it will shape pupils’ attitudes towards their educational path.

In this essay, the new direction of national curriculum 2014 and the theory of music for KS1 are examined. To conclude, possible practical applications of the new curriculum will be suggested.

KS1 Music: New Direction of the Curriculum

In the new national curriculum for 2014, music remains a compulsory subject from KS1 to 3. There are three key ideas behind the new curriculum: creativity, more professional music knowledge and cross-curricular content. The DfE states that the purpose of study is as follows:^{vii}

Music is a universal language that embodies one of the highest forms of creativity. A high-quality music education should engage and inspire pupils to develop a love of music and their talent as musicians, and so increase their self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement. As pupils progress, they should develop a critical engagement with music, allowing them to compose, and to listen with discrimination to the best in the musical canon.

Compared to the old curriculum, the aims seem to cover wider subject contents. The old curriculum divided music into four areas according to musical content: performing skills, composing skills, appraising skills and listening and application of knowledge and understanding. In addition to this, the promotion of key skills related to the inner and cross-curricular development of pupils were listed, such as communication, application of numbers and IT.

The aims of new curriculum

The aims of the new curriculum also seem to have moved more towards musical learning and the use of new materials. The new curriculum aims to ensure that:^{viii}

- All pupils perform, listen to, review and evaluate music across a range of historical periods, genres, styles and traditions, including the work of the great composers and musicians.
- All pupils learn to sing and to use their voices, to create and compose music on their own and with others, have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, use technology appropriately and have the opportunity to progress to the next level of musical excellence.
- All pupils understand and explore how music is created, produced and communicated, including through the interrelated dimensions: pitch, duration, dynamics, tempo, timbre, texture, structure and appropriate musical notions.

The characteristics of new music

The first characteristic of the new music curriculum is a smaller emphasis on IT education. When the author conducted research in local primary schools from 2002-2003, computer programs were used frequently in primary school classrooms, not only in prime subjects such as mathematics but also music. However, due to social and cultural changes, it might not be necessary to focus on IT, as the computer is not as prominent in the world of children as previously.

The second characteristic of the new curriculum is emphasizing on more historical learning of music. This also indicates that pupils learn a wider range of historical music genres. Until 2012, pupils experienced only a few very famous composers' music mainly by listening, for example in KS1, music such as *The Nutcracker Suite* by Tchaikovsky. However, from 2014, teachers need to introduce more varied music and varied composers as well as a little more world music.

Contents of music: characteristics of KS1 music education

For KS1 music, the contents have also been changed. Although the publicly available framework is for reference only, the number of targets seems to be smaller. There is no introduction to the KS1 music section, in contrast to other Key Stages which have full introductions, and only four targets are listed as follows:^{ix}

- Pupils should be taught to use their voices expressively and creatively by singing songs and working with chants and rhymes.
- Pupils should be taught to play tuned and untuned instruments musically.
- Pupils should be taught to listen with concentration and understanding to a range of high-quality live and recorded music.
- Pupils should be taught to experiment with, create, select and combine sounds using the inter-related dimensions of music.

There are three characteristics of KS1 music education. Firstly, as mentioned above, pupils use chants, rhymes and songs creatively as well as expressively. This allows pupils to engage their own imagination and understanding while singing and chanting. This is a very positive change, as the old curriculum only recommended singing and chanting expressively. With this change, pupils will get deeper enjoyment, and also other pupils could be involved in appraising and reviewing their classmates' ideas with support of class teachers. Secondly, listening to live or recorded music was not a main requirement of the old curriculum. In the breadth of study section at the end of KS1 music curriculum, a range of live and recorded music is listed. However, this time the phrase 'high-quality' is added, and also in one of the main aims. This also gives teachers the responsibility of choosing better listening materials, not just playing typical classical music. Also, this also gives pupils more chances to listen to good quality live music. This is surely more rewarding and will strengthen enjoyment of music. Thirdly, pupils will also learn the inter-related dimensions of music. Although a combination of musical elements for playing music was outlined in the curriculum, in the new curriculum, emphasis on inter-related dimensions of music is important. This suggests that pupils explore the world of sound by themselves by applying the musical knowledge learnt in music lessons. This will be attractive to pupils and also develop their general creativity by enabling them to devise sounds and use sim-

ple instruments.

These characteristics of the national curriculum 2014 are radical but effective. Now, the question is if these changes can really fit into KS1 musical education. In the next section, theories of specialists in music education will be reviewed in an attempt to answer this question.

KS1 Music: Theory for Teaching

As mentioned in the previous section, KS1 is the turning point for children in terms of beginning their formal education. Music therefore is a vital tool to help children adjust to classroom life. In other words, KS1 music has a stronger influence at this stage compared to subsequent stages. Teachers need to plan lessons to ease children's transition from non-compulsory nursery school to primary education.

Classroom practice ideas

Patterson and Wheway suggest seven rules which teachers of KS1 music should endeavour to follow:^x

- Take opportunities to stimulate, sustain and enhance children's interest and awareness of sound
- Provide progressive, continuous and relevant musical experience
- Continually assess and keep a record of each pupil's progress
- Recognise individual need and facilitate additional support as and when required
- Identify what music shares with other areas of the curriculum
- Develop social skills and awareness through making music together
- Develop and awareness of, and respect for, musical traditions in a variety of cultures and societies

These suggestions may be difficult for non-music specialist class teachers to apply. Patterson and Wheway also provide some simple guidelines in a more casual style to how teachers could get the best out of the music activities in their classes: these points may be more useful for non-music specialist class teachers:^{xi}

- Children copy teachers
- Keep activities simple
- Children develop at different rates
- Music is organized sound
- Not all activities necessarily lead to a 'performed' product
- Encourage children to care for instruments
- Children bring with them a wealth of musical example

- Develop clear ways of controlling noise
- Music helps those with special needs
- Whole curriculum planning

These ideas will help teachers to plan organized and non-threatening lessons which are also fun.

For music lessons to take place in a good atmosphere, classroom discourse and exuberance are also essential. These can be encouraged from the beginning of a new class. For teachers and pupils, meeting each other at the beginning of a school year brings:^{xii}

[...] a mixed brew of feelings – of optimism, trepidation, a sense of fresh opportunities and new starts – and the challenge of needing to get to know each other quickly.

To make class lessons effective, the lesson planning is important. However, it is no simple task to create a good lesson, and music lessons run the risk of becoming “uninspiring, monotonous and complicated to understand”.^{xiii} Young and Glover suggests the first half term of lessons should include the following:^{xiv}

- It can be new work, aiming to stretch the children and move them on
- It can have carefully thought out ‘diagnostic’ opportunities built in

They state that “the first few weeks are therefore a crucial time for introducing the range of musical opportunities and expectations”.^{xv}

The factor of KS1 music

Makinnon describes the good music lesson as involving “pupils in music, movement and games that they cannot fail to appreciate pitch, rhythm and pulse”.^{xvi} She adds “the piano is the last thing Key Stage 1 children need to appreciate music”.^{xvii} Her words are somehow radical but their underlying assumption is worthy of consideration. Instead, teacher’s unaccompanied singing and well-recorded CDs containing various accompanying styles are essential for KS1 class teachers. By using good CDs, class teachers can pay more attention to each child. This will also facilitate discourse as teachers are free to move whilst the music is playing or give instruction. Young and Glover also suggest the following to strengthen music lessons:^{xviii}

- The teacher can devise activities which allow her to hear and see something of the musical experience and capabilities children bring with them
- Music is a good vehicle for getting to know children in a multifaceted way
- Musical activities are a useful way to bring a new group of children together as a group and to reinforce a sense of community in the classroom

A teacher’s instruction is always important when using instruments in class, as children really respond to handling and playing instruments which they have not touched at nursery schools. Minto suggests

'ground rules' for these kinds of musical activities to obtain maximum benefit and enjoyment.^{xix}

- Only touch the musical instruments when asked
- Leave the beaters on top of the instrument when not in use
- Do not play when you (pupils) are meant to be listening
- Treat the instruments with respect
- Look when you are listening

These rules are also important for KS1 pupils to learn manners in music lesson for the first time and also learn to respect other pupils.

Conclusion: How Classroom Music will Develop

Young and Glover describe the cross-curricular benefit of music lessons for younger children as follows:

[...] a very broadly based subject and is best taught in a climate where it is part of a whole learning environment...rather than confined to a single lesson slot once a week.^{xx}

Considering this comment in the light of music's position as a cross-curricular subject, it is clear that music is an invaluable tool for class teachers to encourage pupils to communicate. This non-threatening subject could help children who may hesitate to communicate other pupils by enabling them to express themselves through musical activities. Therefore, in the 2014 curriculum, music is part of a more holistic approach rather than a separate discipline. By using music as a cross-curricular tool, KS1 subjects can be made more enjoyable and straightforward for young learners. Also, introducing music into other subjects could help pupils communicate easily and improve classroom discourse.

In music, the position of creativity seems to have been emphasised. Pupils are encouraged to create their own music but they are freer to use technology as well as their own devices. If teachers plan composing or music-making in KS1, it should be a group activity. With guidance from class teachers, pupils can plan and create their own music through communication which will have positive repercussions for the class as a whole.

Introducing world music and good live or recorded music is also a new approach in KS1 music. Pupils can experience various kinds of world music they may previously only have seen in a limited way on television. After listening to world music, teachers can suggest that the students try to replicate the music. This can be achieved in a fun and creative way rather than as a more formal attempt but it will certainly help children to learn how to play instruments as well as experimenting with their voices. Providing pupils with good live or recorded music is also beneficial, in that it helps students deep-

en their musical appreciation. Teachers are also awaiting further clarification with regard to teaching the historical background of music and studying composers.

At the moment classroom teachers are preparing for the new curriculum in this transitional year. As the 2014 curriculum has yet to be formally implemented, there is currently little scholarly comment on the changes. However, the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the 2014 curriculum includes changes that are radical but positive. Class teachers may thus feel a certain degree of disorientation for the first term of the 2014 academic year. However, music is still a part of daily classes and if teachers remember Young and Glover's ideas, the new music classes will be successful.^{xxi}

Music works best when it is a part of daily life in the classroom. For many activities, 'little and often' is the key to success. Children's natural enthusiasm for music makes it invaluable at coming-together times and as a way of helping the class to work as a social group...Music in school can contribute to the quality of life just as it does outside it.

Notes

- i Department of Education, *Remit for Review of the National Curriculum* updated on June 2012.
- ii Op. cit.,
- iii Op. cit.,
- iv Apart from English, mathematics and science for years 2 and 6, English, mathematics and science for KS4. These subjects will be phased in from September 2015.
- v Department for Education, *Primary National Curriculum 'Music'* updated on 02 August 2013.
- vi Department for Education, *2014 National Curriculum* updated in 2013.
- vii Department for Education, *Music Program of Study: Key Stages 1 and 2* published on September 2013.
- viii Op. cit.,
- ix Op. cit.,
- x Anice Paterson and David Wheway, *Kickstart Music 1* (London: A&C Black, 2010), 'introducing kickstart'
- xi Op. cit., 'music with your class'
- xii Suzan Young and Joanna Glover, *Music in the Early Years* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 1998), p. 7.
- xiii Ann Bryant, *Key Stage 1 Music* (London: International Music, 2002), p. 4.
- xiv Young and Glover, p. 8.
- xv Op. cit.,
- xvi Bryant, Foreword.
- xvii Op. cit.,
- xviii Young and Glover, pp. 7-8.
- xix Donna Minto, *Games, Ideas and Activities for Primary Music* (Harlow: Pearson, 2009), Introduction p. ix.
- xx Young and Glover, p. 8.
- xxi Op. cit., p. 9.

Bibliography

- Bryant, Ann. *Teaching Key Stage 1 Music* (London: International Music, 2002)
- Campbell, Patricia Shehan. and Scott-Kassner, Carol. *Music in the Childhood* (3rd ed.) (Boston: Schirmer, 2010)
- Department of Education and Employment, *Music* (London: The Stationery Office, 1999)
- Glover, Joanna. and Ward, Stephen. eds. *Teaching Music in the Primary School* (2nd ed.) (London: Continuum, 1998)
- Malloch, Stephen. and Trevarthen, Colwyn. eds. “Musicality in Childhood Learning” in Malloch, Stephen. and Trevarthen, Colwyn. eds. *Communicative Musicality* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Mills, Janet. *Music in the Primary School* (3rd ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Minto, Donna. *Games, Ideas and Activities for Primary Music* (Harlow: Pearson, 2009)
- Paterson, Anice. and Wheway, David., *Kickstart Music 1* (London: A&C Black, 2010)
- Pascal, Christine. “The Effective Early Learning project and the National Curriculum” in Cox, Theo, ed. *The National Curriculum and the Early Years* (London: The Farmer Press, 1996)
- Young, Suzan. and Glover, Joanna. *Music in the Early Years* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 1998)

Internet Sources

- Department for Education. ‘*Primary National Curriculum Music*’
<<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-music-programmes-of-study>> [accessed 12 November 2013]
- _____. ‘*Remit for Review of the National Curriculum in England – Schools*’ <<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum2014/nationalcurriculum/b0073043>> [accessed 9 December 2013]
- _____. ‘*2014 National Curriculum*’
<<http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-primary-curriculum>> [accessed 12 November 2013]