

Chapter 1

Primary teachers and music

I am more concerned for the future of the human race than I am for the future of music.

Richard Addison in *Beyond Music* (Addison 1988: 13)

Music education should be mainly concerned with bringing pupils into contact with the musician's fundamental activities of performing, composing and learning.

HM Inspectorate in *Curriculum Matters 4: Music from 5 to 16*
(DES 1985: 2)

I have to say, in the end, I think that all that matters in music education is that what we do is musical [i.e. of music]. I don't care what it is. I would applaud whatever was happening in a classroom provided that it was actually involving pupils in musical experience.

John Paynter, in W. Salaman, 'Personalities in World Music Education'
(Salaman 1988: 13)

Music in primary schools

I start by outlining my view of the place of music in primary schools. Like Richard Addison, I think that music education has more to do with the education of pupils than the transmission of some musical heritage, however defined. Like the writers of *Music from 5 to 16*, I think of music education as an active experience in which pupils compose, perform, and listen. Like John Paynter, I want pupils actually to do music during music lessons, and I do not feel that there is a canon of music that everyone—pupil or teacher—should learn. I believe that the values and principles that Richard Addison, HM Inspectors, and John Paynter, amongst others, expounded in the late 1980s were those upon which the National Curriculum for music in England and Wales was built, and has been developed subsequently. I believe also that these values and principles would underpin any sensible music education anywhere, and at any time, whether or not there was a National Curriculum in place.

Not all activities that sometimes pass for music in primary school are, in my terms, music. Drawing a flute is not music, though it might be an appropriate artistic activity for pupils who have just performed the musical activity of listening to a flute being played. Reading about the life of Mozart is not music, though it could be a useful language exercise for pupils who have listened to a piece by Mozart, and who want to find out more about his life. Making a musical instrument is not music, though playing it may be. Learning to operate a piece of computer software is not music, but using it to enhance composing or performing is a thoroughly musical activity.

The activities of composing, performing, and listening are fundamental to musicianship, and practice in them may result in some pupils ultimately choosing careers in music, for example as jazz musician, composer, critic, or music teacher. But I do not engage primary pupils in composing, performing, and listening out of any vocational motive—rather because I want them to grow through music. All pupils can grow through music, so music education is for all pupils.

As music is for all pupils, the music curriculum must be determined in response to individual musical need. No single blanket programme will be suitable for all pupils, any more than it would be in mathematics or English. No special group, for instance, those, sometimes referred to as gifted or talented, who will become able performers, has any higher claim on the music curriculum. All pupils have an equal right to an appropriate music education.

Music is for all teachers. I mean by this that primary pupils ideally do most, if not all, of their music with their class teacher, not a specialist teacher who sees them only for music. In the past, many primary schools employed teachers who teach only music—sometimes known as music specialists—to take responsibility for the music of several classes. This contrasted with practice in all other curriculum areas where classes are taught usually by class teachers on the grounds that the advantages of having a teacher who knows you outweighs those of being taught by someone with particular specialist expertise (Mills 1995/6). If this is true of other areas, why is it not true of music? In practice, music is often perceived as being different because music teachers are assumed to need skills that it would be unreasonable to expect all teachers to possess. Music lessons are sometimes organized rather like rehearsals of choirs and orchestras, with the teacher conducting, playing piano or guitar, and demonstrating on a range of instruments, including her singing voice. In this sort of lesson, the teacher does need to be in musical control. But, as we shall see later, there is no need to organize music lessons like this. Just as we can develop pupils' written language without being a novelist, it is perfectly possible to engage pupils in music without being a pianist. Of course, having specialist

music skills is useful to teachers, and schools will still need teachers who can play the piano or keyboard, direct choirs, and so forth. But there is no need for these people to do all the music teaching in the school. Class teachers, given appropriate preparation and support, are all capable of teaching music. This way, music takes its place as part of the whole primary curriculum. Pupils and teachers make day-to-day links between work in music and other curriculum areas. Class teachers who have traditionally accepted full responsibility for the progress of each pupil in their class will know their pupils' musical progress at first hand.

Finally, music in the primary school must be an activity that is pleasurable for both pupils and teachers. I do not mean to suggest that music should be organized solely as entertainment, or that the atmosphere in a music lesson should always be akin to that of a party. In any case, that would be unlikely to result in pleasure for the teacher. I mean that the process of working as a musician—by composing, performing, and listening—must be enjoyable if it is to have any value. Similarly, the business of facilitating the musical activity of pupils must be pleasurable and satisfying for the teacher. Music lessons that become boring, which degenerate into disciplinary incidents, or which culminate in the teacher haranguing the class about extra-musical matters, such as holding books properly, paying attention, and sitting up straight, are worse than useless. Pupils who repeatedly attend this sort of music lesson become disenchanted with music long before they enter secondary school. Of course there will be moments in music lessons when a pupil has to be reprimanded. There will be occasions when pupils must be encouraged to increase the standards they set for their work in music. This might even mean asking pupils to revisit work they rather hoped was finished. But music should be something we engage in because we feel better for it. It should never become a mere duty, for teachers or pupils.

In short, music is

- ◆ an active subject consisting of the activities of composing, performing, and listening
- ◆ for all pupils
- ◆ for all teachers
- ◆ fun.

Primary music teachers

I have said that music is a subject for all teachers. Yet there are, at present, many primary teachers who are reluctant to teach music. There is nothing

new about this. Research¹ (DES 1978) carried out before the National Curriculum was introduced showed that music was the subject in which pupils were most likely to be taught by someone other than their class teacher. In 1983² it was also the subject that fewest teachers thought they needed to be able to teach (Primary Schools Research and Development Group 1983). Does this mean that music was a low priority in primary school? Hardly. Many primary schools³ went to the trouble of arranging for musicians working in the community to carry out projects in their school (DES 1978; DES 1982; DES 1985). Others appointed special music teachers. Long before the National Curriculum⁴ was introduced, so that no school was obliged to teach music, advertisements for primary posts referred to music more frequently than any other subject. However, the special music teachers tended to operate in different ways from teachers with curriculum responsibility in any other subject. Whereas mathematics curriculum leaders, for instance, often operated mainly as coordinators of the school mathematics curriculum, and as advisers to their colleagues, music curriculum leaders were more likely to take over the music of several classes, whilst their own teachers were busy elsewhere. In other words, music curriculum leaders tended to operate as specialists, not as consultants.

This remains the case today. Moreover, in recent years, more primary schools have received projects given by musicians working in the community, or from arts organizations such as orchestras. While many of these projects are

¹ In the Primary Survey (DES 1978: 21), HMI found that 40 per cent of 7-year-olds, 50 per cent of 9-year-olds, and 55 per cent of 11-year-olds were taught music by someone other than their class teacher. There was no other subject in which fewer pupils were taught by their class teacher.

² In a survey of the opinions of 465 primary teachers, the Primary Schools Research and Development Group (1983) found that 26.6 per cent of teachers thought there was little need for all teachers to be able to teach music. A total of 19.6 per cent of teachers thought there was little need for all teachers to be competent in Religious Education. The percentages given for all other subjects were substantially lower.

³ According to a series of HMI surveys (DES 1978, 1982, 1985), around 80 per cent of primary schools of at least moderate size had a teacher with special curriculum responsibility for music. No other subject had more teachers with special responsibility.

⁴ Analysis of references to subjects in advertisements for initial primary posts in the *Times Educational Supplement* over various periods during the 1980s consistently showed more mention of music than any other subject. Interestingly, music remained the most sought-after subject strength in an analysis that I carried out over a three-week period in the spring of 1989, a time when one might have expected primary schools to be attempting to develop their subject strengths in mathematics, English, and science, in anticipation of the introduction of the National Curriculum in these subjects in September 1989.

excellent, and promote pupils' learning and enthusiasm, others are not. It is easy for school teachers to be dazzled by the musical skills of visiting musicians. It is worth bearing in mind that many visiting musicians are not qualified teachers, and that they may have less understanding than school teachers about how pupils learn, what they can achieve, and the expectations that the government makes of schools.

The idea of generalist music teaching is not a new one. The Plowden Report (CACE 1967) came out in favour of it more than 40 years ago. So why is music still so often taught by teachers who only, or mainly, teach that subject? There are, I think, two main, linked, reasons. First, many class teachers lack confidence in their ability to teach music. Second, many music curriculum leaders have not developed an ability to raise the confidence of their colleagues. In other words, these curriculum leaders have not learnt to act as consultants to generalists without specialist music skills. The same is true of some of the community musicians who visit primary schools with the aim of supporting the teaching there.

Most primary teachers received their own primary music teaching at the hands of music specialists who displayed formal skills such as piano playing and conducting. Today's music specialists are also able to draw on these skills when they wish to help pupils achieve a musical objective. There are, as we shall see, hardly any situations in which display of these skills is crucial to pupils' progress; teachers usually have a number of options concerning their teaching style. Specialists use specialist skills out of habit or preference, not necessity. But because they often appear to use these skills as a matter of course, their performance can seem intimidating and unachievable to outsiders. Primary music can seem to be about the demonstration of teacher skills, not the promotion of pupils' learning.

Generalists often arrive at their professional training with a well-established low confidence in their ability to teach music. When I began to work with generalists in training, in the 1980s, I found that music was the subject which worried them most initially (Mills 1989b), and the time that is available for music in initial training courses has roughly halved since then. Many primary trainees attribute their low confidence to an inability to emulate the teaching style of the music teachers they remembered from their own primary education. They speak of what they perceive to be their own musical inadequacies; perhaps they do not play the piano, or perhaps they are not confident singers. Often, sadly, they first decided that they were inadequate as musicians when a primary teacher criticized their musicianship. The story most frequently told was one of rejection from a primary-school choir.

These aspiring teachers measured their musical competence by what they could not do. Measurement of what they *can* do would be more to the point.

Every aspiring teacher I have met is able to do a great deal. Nearly all enjoy listening to some particular styles of music. Many have experience of playing one or more instruments, perhaps by ear. These are musical activities which can be shared with school pupils, and from which new skills and interests grow. But teachers and trainees bring much more than their music skills to their music teaching: they bring their teaching expertise. The teaching skills that teachers use to facilitate pupils' learning in mathematics, English, and so on, can be applied to music too. Music teaching is not about teachers performing to pupils; it is about children learning. Performing to pupils is only one way of helping pupils to learn. There are many situations in which other teaching techniques are equally, if not more, effective.

Although many aspiring primary teachers lack confidence in music, others have no such worries. Perhaps they have taken piano lessons for some years, or achieved an A level⁵ in music. They may have taken some optional extra courses in music while they were studying as teachers, or they may have entered a teacher training course on completion of a music degree. Such student teachers have a head start over their colleagues. This is not just because they have skills which the others lack; there are ways of getting round that. Their advantage is that they already have musical self-esteem. They can make positive statements about their abilities and achievements as composers, performers, and listeners. They may feel that the pattern of their musical development has been uneven. Perhaps they have specialized in performing at the expense of composing, or perhaps their listening experience has been narrow. But they know that they start music teaching from a position of some strength.

We seek to develop musical self-esteem in those whom we teach. We want them to feel satisfaction when they achieve something worthwhile. The view that pupils with self-esteem achieve more, and that the relationship is, to some extent, causal, underpins much contemporary educational practice. Pupils are agreed to generally accomplish more when encouraged to think positively about their strengths and achievements, whilst remaining sensitive to the possibility of further development. Failure motivates but rarely. The politicians who used to think otherwise⁶ have generally adjusted their views.

If self-esteem is good for pupils, then it seems likely that it is good for teachers teaching music. Teachers with musical self-esteem can enable less confident colleagues to develop it. First, they can tackle the matter head on.

⁵ A levels, Advanced Level General Certificates of Education, still exist as academic examinations routinely taken by 18-year-olds.

⁶ For example, in 1987 Oliver Letwin MP wrote that pupils 'had better learn from the earliest possible age to come to terms with their own capabilities' (Letwin 1987).

They can encourage colleagues to list their skills, and help them to develop approaches to music teaching that they feel ready to try. Second, they can show, through at least occasional demonstration of teaching approaches, within the reach of generalist colleagues, that it is possible to teach music without recourse to special skills. This means thinking about the options that teachers have when deciding how to help pupils to achieve a musical objective, and not always making a 'specialist' selection.

Teachers under stress can revert to teaching as they were taught, whatever the content and approach of their teacher training. As most teachers are the product of a specialist system of primary music teaching, this is an obstacle to the development of generalist music teaching. Faced with a colleague who is worried about teaching music, a music curriculum leader may be tempted to teach the class personally, rather than help the other's development in music teaching. This does not promote the development of the generalist's self-esteem. Nor does it develop musical self-esteem in the pupils involved, for they become aware that music cannot be handled by everyone. Through musical consultancy, rather than specialist music teaching, a more positive cycle of musical confidence can be generated. Pupils become the teachers of tomorrow. The musical self-esteem of teachers will, progressively, rise.

Music is, as we have seen, a subject of extremes. It has most specialist teachers, is taught by fewest class teachers, and is the subject in which most trainee teachers feel least confident. But it is far from a doomed subject. What we need to do is to channel the abilities of all those specialists away from perpetuating the myth that primary music can be taught only by those like them, and towards the development of more generalist music teaching.

Towards music teaching

Up to now we have concentrated on the importance of all teachers learning to lead musical activities with pupils. But activities alone do not make a curriculum. We need to think also about the aims and purposes of music teaching, and about balance, progression, and evaluation. We must consider the relationship of music to the whole primary curriculum, and the role of music within the life of the school. In other words, we need some sort of theoretical framework for our teaching. I take the view that the idea of a framework makes more sense when teachers already have experience of leading musical activity. The structure of this book reflects this view. The development of a theoretical framework is left to Part II. In Part I, the focus is on the organization of music-making. Aims, planning and preparation, evaluation, progression, links with other subjects, and so on, are addressed only on a day-to-day

level. The context of this music-making is simply a music curriculum which is active, for all, and fun. There is an emphasis on the variety of approaches which teachers of differing taste and experience may use to involve pupils in music-making. Part I is, in a sense, teacher-centred.

Part II is more pupil-centred. Following a chapter on aspects of pupils' development in music, the subject of curriculum planning is addressed. Music is then set within the primary curriculum and, finally, within the primary school. No single framework for primary music could suit all schools or teachers. Much depends on the participating pupils and teachers, the school ethos, prevailing local and national government policies, and so on. Consequently, I do not provide any blueprints. The information here is intended to help teachers develop their own framework, and to design and implement a curriculum that fits their particular circumstances.

The whole of this book is addressed to all teachers, and all other musicians working in school. There is no special section for generalists, or one for music consultants, or one for visiting musicians. Initially, the needs of generalists and consultants, in particular, may differ in emphasis. Generalists starting to teach music may at first be preoccupied with finding activities with which they can cope. Other readers may be concerned more with developing their range of teaching approaches, with curriculum development, or with other long-term issues. But even the most hesitant generalists soon become able to take significant personal responsibility for their music teaching. The relationship between generalists and consultants in music stabilizes to become no different from that in other subjects. Both generalists and consultants become involved in the development and implementation of school music policy. So all teachers will, eventually, want to think about the matters dealt with in Part II.

Whenever possible, I avoid the use of musical jargon. Where inclusion of a term which may be unfamiliar to some readers seems unavoidable, its first appearance is accompanied by a few words of explanation. Staff notation—sometimes called stave notation or conventional music notation—does not appear at all. Many teachers can read music, or are learning to do so. But a book that contains staff notation is impenetrable to those who cannot already read it fluently. Since much primary music—possibly all—can be taught effectively without recourse to staff notation, there is no point in including it here. Teachers who do read music will have no difficulty in seeing how to apply this skill to their teaching, when they feel that this is appropriate.

Writing a book which is accessible to all teachers has involved careful choice of language, but no compromise of musical or educational purpose. There is nothing second-best about a properly organized and supported system of generalist music teaching.