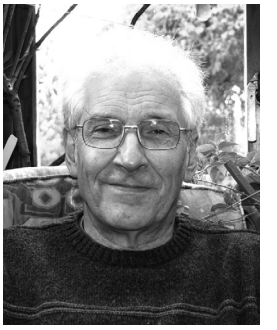
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Reflections on my time as a joint editor



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Piers Spencer and William Salaman edited the BJME between 1998 and 2002. During this period, a number of articles they published gave positive accounts of developments in instrumental teaching and learning, composing and creative music-making, and the increasing role of technology. Less happy findings emerged from investigations into singing and vocal work, into culture and the promotion of equal opportunities, and into the way the 'official' curriculum seemed to be increasingly at odds with students' experience of music outside schools. During his period as editor, Piers Spencer worked in a variety of institutions and his personal experience told him that, despite the highly critical tone of some contributions, there remains cause for optimism about the future of musical education, both in the UK and internationally.

It was a privilege to edit the BJME with my friend and colleague William Salaman between 1998 and 2002. In 1998, I retired from my post at Exeter University and worked freelance in a variety of educational settings. I contributed to the setting-up of a new degree in the South-West, spent a year as a consultant at the Royal Academy of Music, worked as a supply teacher, as an examiner and as a tutor for the Open University. These fresh experiences formed the background to my work as editor and put the views expressed in the articles we published into often striking relief. Most contributions fell under five headings:

- Instrumental teaching and learning.
- Composing, creative music making and the role of technology in promoting these.
- Singing and vocal work.
- The curriculum and music's place in school and society.
- Culture and the promotion of equal opportunities.

Of the above, articles published under the first two headings conveyed generally optimistic messages, while the latter three identified areas that were more problematic. Let's take the positive messages first.

Instrumental teaching and learning

Instrumental teaching was a rich and fascinating area where writers were most confident in their ability to identify and solve problems. Martin Gellrich and Richard Parncutt (15.1) showed that there was much to learn from early 19th century piano pedagogy. Peter Cope (15.3) saw how instrumental lessons gave students skills that transferred to areas outside

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music. Doris da Costa (16.1), Susan Hallam (18.1), Siw Nielsen (16.3), James Renwick and Gary McPherson (19.2) had useful things to tell us about ways to support practising and make it both stimulating and enjoyable. Deborah Mawer (16.2) showed how students could learn to integrate the physical act of playing with mentally 'hearing' the structure of the music they were performing. Amanda Bosch and John Hinch (16.3) explored the Alexander Technique. Using the neurologist's 'left-right' brain model as a starting point, Sally Chappell (16.3) urged piano teachers to consider balancing the teaching of technique with that of creative, imaginative musicianship. Harald Jørgensen (17.1) and Ryan Daniel (18.3) showed how conservatoires and universities were interrogating traditional ways of passing on instrumental wisdom and developing innovative methods that gave students greater autonomy in setting the pace of their learning.

Composing, creative music making and the role of technology in promoting these

Composing was a relatively new area in the British school curriculum that came in during the 1970s largely through the influence of luminaries such as John Paynter and the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in 1985. However, Stephanie Pitts (15.1) showed there was a long previous history to promoting creative music-making. John Paynter himself maintained his passionate advocacy, with a welcome article in issue 17.1.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) were providing access to music in new and exciting ways. Janet Mills and Andy Murray (17.2) observed 11–14-year-old pupils using ICT to support musical learning, while Göran Folkestad, David Hargreaves and Berner Lindström (15.1) offered close analyses of pupils' thinking when composing with computers. Adrian Pitts and Robert Mawuena Kwami (19.1) showed us the extraordinary changes in teacher attitudes that computers have brought about and Maria Busen Smith (16.2) looked at the implications for the training of future teachers.

Pamela Burnard (17.3 and 19.2) explored both composition and improvisation, using the judgements and opinions of pupils as effective tools for teasing out the differences. George Odam (17.2) and Rebecca Berkley (18.2) struck cautionary notes, pointing to the many difficulties and pitfalls involved in teaching composing. Odam felt that the question of how best to organise composing in schools had never been fully resolved. While acknowledging that it is daunting both to plan for and to assess, Berkley felt that the effort was justified because, of all musical learning activities, composing gave students the most potential to be creative and to take responsibility for the learning process. Two inspiring articles bridged the world of creativity in school and in higher education. Mary Kennedy (16.2) presented a comparative case study of two young American composers engaged in setting a poem by Robert Frost. From Australia, Ros McMillan (16.3) explored the potential of jazz in promoting creative musical thought.

Singing and vocal work

Turning to areas that seemed to meet with less success, the reluctance of British children to sing was a recurring theme, with evidence provided by Nicholas Bannan (17.3), Angela

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Turton and Colin Durrant (19.1). Graham Welch and John Cooksey (15.1) looked at changing adolescent voices and lamented the lack of guidance given to teachers over this issue. Ever the optimist, however, Janet Mills (17.1) provided us with some vivid examples of good vocal work. She commented: 'The oft-lamented decline of singing in school, like many other reported declines in education is probably more imaginary than real.' It was a relief also to read the historical perspectives provided by Michael Lynch (18.2) and Mary Ryng (19.2) and to realise that some of these issues were with us over a century ago!

The Curriculum and music's place in school and society

Overall, it seems, musical education in Britain continued to have a bad press. The quality of music in primary schools remained patchy, through the pressures of time and the lack of expertise among teachers. Angela Knapp (17.3) saw the government's imposition in 1998 of the 'literacy hour' on English primary schools added worryingly to the erosion of space for the creative arts, particularly music. Sarah Hennessy (17.2) addressed the question of how the training of infant and junior teachers might help to overcome feelings of musical inadequacy. These issues were not new. Gordon Cox (15.3) showed how previously the lack of agreement among experts and apathy within the teaching profession dogged the society for promoting the Musical Education of the Under-Twelves between 1949 and 1983. Going further back, Mary Ryng (19.2) showed how Peter Goodman, who worked in Ireland at the beginning of the last century fought to overcome teachers' lack of confidence in their musical skills, particularly singing.

Turning to secondary education, Malcolm Ross (15.3) compared the inspirational atmosphere of the Dartington Summer School with what he heard in schools. He declared, somewhat sourly, 'Frankly, if music education – as instruction and assessment – cannot be reformed it should be allowed to die'. Brendan Drummond (16.1) painted a gloomy picture of the situation in Northern Ireland, while his account (18.1) of the working lives of music teachers showed many of them to be motivated more by extra- curricular performance than by the classroom. David Bray's examination of GCSE uptakes (17.1) saw over 90% of pupils turn their back on music in school at the age of 14.

The British National Curriculum was less than a decade old in 1998 and had already undergone a series of revisions. William Salaman's first editorial (15.1) saw the 1995 version as offering 'little in the way of educational or musical stimulus for those seeking to challenge the assumptions of their own teaching'. A number of writers observed a tendency to separate and compartmentalise different aspects of musical learning. Most damaging of all, composing and performing had come to be seen as separate and unrelated activities. Keith Swanwick and Cecilia Franca (16.1) added evidence to support claims for an integrated music curriculum. John Finney (16.3) went further, urging a fundamental re-examination of aims. Mark Sheridan and Charles Byrne (19.2) warned that without a more visionary conception of the learning process in the minds of both teachers and taught, current assessment procedures would simply continue in their failure to promote the 'meaningful, creative experiences' that they should be encouraging.

Article after article drew attention to the impression that 'school music' was remote from the musical experiences young people pursued elsewhere. This was not an issue

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confined to one country. Graça Boal-Palheiros and David Hargreaves (18.2) reported on pupils' experiences in both England and Portugal. While music at home and in other informal contexts seemed to fulfil *emotional* and *social* functions, at school it tended to convey mainly a *cognitive* function and was consequently undervalued. Ruth Wright's (19.3) interviews with pupils in a Welsh comprehensive school yielded a similar picture.

Culture and the promotion of equal opportunities

Several articles dealt with ways of promoting access to music for all students. Sarah Maidlow and Betty Hanley (15.1), Ruth Wright (18.3) and Wai-chung Ho (18.1) tackled gender, while Diana Harris (19.1) presented a disturbing picture of the attitudes of some Muslim communities towards music in schools.

Our special 'African' issue (15.2) came up with much worrying evidence. Elizabeth Oehrle showed how the legacy of apartheid cast a long shadow over practices in many South African schools that failed to recognise and value the diversity of music that children experienced at home and within their local communities. 'Before going to school, many an African child is a fully capable musician. The present school method of music soon knocks this potential out.' Elizabeth de Lowerntal, Richard Okafor and Trevor Wiggins found that students across the continent were increasingly rejecting their rich oral heritage of traditional music in favour of Western pop. In Botswana, according to Mothusi Phutego, a 'Eurocentric' curriculum in teacher training colleges ensured that even the traditional marriage between music and dance reflected in the community outside schools was rejected in favour of classes in the 'theory of music to aid sight-reading'.

China also provided a rich source of information about developing approaches to music education. Wai-chung Ho (16.3) showed how schools in Hong Kong, like in Botswana, had pursued a 'Western-oriented' curriculum, but paid little attention to their native musical culture. All this was changing now that the mainland had absorbed Hong Kong.

Some conclusions and pointers for further research

Re-reading the articles published during the five years, I was struck by the generally gloomy tenor of many of them. Educational research *should* be critical and look for improvements. But I can't help feeling, too, that some writers were harder on the scene in the UK than was deserved. As I said at the outset, my 'day jobs' freelancing while editor put me in close touch with musical education in a variety of settings around the country. My experiences on the shop floor told me a somewhat different story. Strictly speaking, they are not 'research data' but in my view, over the 40 or so years since I started work as a teacher, they contributed powerfully to the impression that many things have improved beyond recognition.

Schools are now much better equipped, with better room facilities, a massive influx of equipment, including computers, recording studios and data projection in classrooms. Lucy Green (19.1) showed secondary teachers had become more open to embracing a wide variety of styles and cultures. There has been a steady increase in numbers opting to pursue music for GCSE and the content of A-level courses now includes composition, practical music making and the exploration of a much wider repertory. ICT plays a major role in much of this and there are successful A-level and equivalent vocational courses

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exploring music technology as a specialism. Further education colleges offer a wider range of post-16 courses, with a more diverse clientèle, including students who would not have previously considered pursuing the subject.

The quality of students' creative work also deserves celebrating. In conducting a survey of GCSE coursework for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in 2006, I spoke to a number of subject officers of the different exam boards, who had pointed out the stunning quality of much GCSE composing coursework. While singers and instrumentalists get the recognition they deserve, perhaps we don't celebrate students' achievements in composing enough. The title of John Paynter's (17.1) article was 'making progress with composing'. Listening to the CDs produced to accompany the journal will show that teachers and students are indeed doing just that.

Cause for optimism can be found, too, in the wider choice that children now have when learning to play instruments through the school system. The Education Act of 1988 drastically reduced the role of British local education authorities (LEAs). At the time, there was much anxiety about the future of state-funded instrumental teaching. In fact, the redistribution of money to schools has made the providers of instrumental lessons more responsive to the range and diversity of students' choices. Clearly the picture of state-funded instrumental provision is changing, and research is needed to provide us with the facts regarding new trends and developments.

Turning to higher education, music colleges have developed more intellectually challenging degree courses and the old 'academic-practical' divide between conservatoires and universities has disappeared for good. Recent National Student Surveys have given colleges and many university music departments consistently high ratings for student satisfaction. Teacher training is similarly more detailed and rigorous, with issues such as short and long-term planning, self-evaluation and teaching according to the learning needs of individuals addressed in greater detail than when I trained in the 1960s. Working as an external examiner, I have been heartened by the committed and detailed support of tutors and the involvement of school teachers and mentors in the training process. In addition, the present government has put its weight behind national initiatives such as the Music Manifesto and Musical Futures. In my view, there is much to celebrate.

If I can draw attention to some interesting articles which did not fall into any of the headings that I listed at the start, I would have liked to read more on topics such as Desmond Hunter's (16.1) persuasive survey of peer learning and assessment in higher education and Pauline Tambling's vivid analysis of the way the formidable resources of the Royal Opera House supported the work of teachers (16.2). Both these critiques deserved follow-up investigation and reporting.

I must conclude on a personal note. My years as editor were hard work, but also ones of considerable enjoyment at being involved in the process of supporting so many different writers from all over the world. In particular it was an unalloyed pleasure to renew an association with my former colleague, William Salaman. Our period 'in office' was marked by intellectual stimulation, companionship and good humour. But I do have to report a note of sadness at the loss through untimely death of three colleagues since our tenure ended. Two of them, Robert Mawuena Kwami and Janet Mills were regular contributors to the journal and a spirit of optimism about schools teachers and pupils inspired both of them. The third was Professor Ted Wragg, who wrote an article in the

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Times Educational Supplement (28 April 2000) about the teacher who did most for him while he was at school. It happened to be his music teacher: 'The real challenge for teachers, stretching way beyond test scores, important though these may be, is whether they have a lifelong effect on their pupils. Only many years after leaving school can we begin to assess such long-term aspirations.' If I can suggest one important area of research to pursue in future, it will be to take up the challenge implicit in Ted's tribute to his former teacher. An investigation into the long-term effects of music teaching will, I believe, yield some fascinating data.

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