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Music for all:
Musical instrument instruction
and equity in Scotland's schools



Dr Lio Moscardini, School of Education
University of Strathclyde

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POLICY BRIEF

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Music for all: musical instrument instruction and equity in Scotland's schools

Dr Lio Moscardini, School of Education, University of Strathclyde

Abstract

Instrumental music instruction is a non-statutory service in Scotland. It is additional to regular classroom music activities. Instrumental Music Services are under pressure to widen access and participation for all learners while being constrained by increasing cutbacks. In addition to issues of capacity, there is the issue of equitable access to participation and to instructors' confidence to deal with diversity. Consideration needs to be given to the kind of professional development that might support a more inclusive instrumental music service in Scotland.

Key messages

- Instrumental Music Services are caught between working within budgetary constraints and responding to the recognised need to widen access and participation of all to achieve a more inclusive service.
- Equality of opportunity is about more than having a representation of children with additional support needs (ASN) involved in artistic activities.
- The elimination of tuition fees *per se* is not sufficient to ensure effective access and participation and equality of opportunity.
- Aptitude testing reinforces inequality: current selection procedures based on aptitude testing used by some instructors are inequitable and privilege children with particular experiences related to cultural and social capital.
- Professional development of instrumental instructors should build on what instructors already know and do in their teaching and focus on how they use this knowledge to make instrumental instruction accessible to *all* learners. This should include understanding additional support needs as a broad social construct that includes but goes beyond disability.

I Background

Playing a musical instrument is seen as an intrinsically valuable and worthwhile activity, so much so that for many adults it remains an unfulfilled aspiration. For many children the opportunity to learn to play an instrument first arises in primary school; that this opportunity should be *equitable* reflects Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that there should be 'appropriate and equal opportunities for children to participate in cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities'.

In Scotland, Instrumental Music Services (IMS), established in all 32 Scottish Local Authorities, are a discretionary service with the function to provide instrumental music tuition in schools. Instrumental instruction is additional to the regular music curriculum of the classroom. Across Scotland, around 633 instructors provide instrumental tuition to over 55,000 pupils (Scottish Government, 2013).

II Funding, access and *equality* of opportunity

There is an aspiration that every child in Scotland should have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument (EIS, 2010). Instrumental Music Services work under increasingly tight budgets and are working to the limits of their capacity (Improvement Service, 2013). Some authorities have sought to address the issue of budget cuts by introducing tuition fees. There have been expressions of concern that budget cuts should not have a negative impact on the opportunity for Scottish children and young people to receive instrumental instruction. These concerns have been highlighted in the press, particularly through a high-profile campaign aimed at eliminating fees.

At the same time Scotland has a new curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), the philosophy is an inclusive one. Its stated purpose is:

'to ensure all the children and young people of Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and work, now and in the future' (LTS, 2010).

This inclusive stance reflects statutory guidance under the provision of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004/2009 which makes it clear that all children with additional support needs (ASN) have an entitlement to have their needs met through appropriate support in all curricular areas. The Act stipulates that Local Authorities have a duty towards all children to ensure 'the development of personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential'.

So on the one hand, Instrumental Music Services are being required to work within their existing capacity on reducing budgets and on the other, they are being asked to widen access and develop a more inclusive service.

III Evidence of the problem

National and international research studies suggests that some children and young people are denied access to music activities in general and instrumental instruction in particular (cited in Moscardini, Barron & Wilson, 2013). This is not a recent problem. In 1998, the then Scottish Office commissioned a report to investigate musical instrument instruction in Scotland. It identified a need to consider provision for children with special educational needs. In 2003, a Scottish Arts Council commissioned study reported that there was indeed a need for better support for children with additional support needs.

Most recently, a Scottish Government report in 2013 on instrumental instruction in Scotland identified that there was 'limited and variable provision of instrumental music tuition available for pupils with additional support needs' and recommended that 'pupils' individual circumstances should not be a barrier to their ability to access and benefit from instrumental instruction' (Scottish Government, 2013).

A survey of Instrumental Music Services across Scotland (Improvement Service, 2013) found no universal pattern of relationship between the introduction of tuition fees and uptake of lessons across Scotland. The picture varies across Local Authorities (LAs); some LAs which have introduced fees have witnessed a decline in numbers, however nearly all LAs have introduced concessions for low-income families. The report recognises the complexity of factors that contribute to pupil uptake. Tuition fees is only one such factor; reductions in staffing and other service cutbacks, the range and number of instruments and instructors available, and selection procedures also contribute. Importantly, the report states that 'no Local Authority in Scotland has a completely universal instrumental music service in the sense that any pupil can access tuition on any instrument' (p.4). Nevertheless it recognises the commitment of the service - and its strongly held aim - to offer the best possible services within the available resources.

Who gets to play?

A recent study (Moscardini et al., 2013) investigated the extent to which the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument in primary school was equitable. It found that children with additional support needs were significantly under-represented. Of a sample population of 5,122 children, 323 received lessons of whom 45 were identified as having additional support needs. Of this group, 28 were within a dyslexia category, with no children with a physical impairment

or severe learning difficulty. Of the 323 who received lessons, and the 45 identified with ASN, there was only *one* child who struggled across the curriculum and who might be described as having moderate learning difficulties – a category which represents the largest group of children with additional support needs. This latter group is closely connected to low-attainment and underachievement and is associated with poverty and deprivation. The extremely low representation of this group contrasts with the disproportionately high representation of dyslexia and is also reflected in the finding that of the 323 children who received music lessons, fully 287 (89%) had average or above average academic attainment.

The study noted that Local Authority (LA) policy aims were similar to that of the EIS Charter and were often expressed in interview by Heads of Service and Head teachers. There was a strong sense that there was opportunity for all because instrumental instruction was *offered* to all: '*So many of them are in mainstream that they have the same opportunity as anyone else*'. One Headteacher said '*...there are certain criteria but obviously it's open to anyone that wants it*.' The study also found that in some LAs there was a 'top-down' deployment of instructors into secondary schools where pupils were being presented for leaving exams in music. Instructors were then allocated to related primary schools once the secondary provision had been addressed. This deployment process may be seen as a means to bolster music exam attainment and also explain the absence of instrumental instructors in primary schools in particular areas of deprivation.

Instrumental instructors were gatekeepers to the system. Most expressed a desire to teach a wide range of children but felt constrained by the system. Some considered the issue to be one of children with additional support needs '*not wanting to come forward*'. Although instructors indicate a willingness to teach all children, this was often conditional on perceived ability '*I would actively seek opportunities for children with ASN ... so long as they show ability*'. This may help explain the almost total absence of pupils with significant learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

IV Models for professional learning

Evidence shows that if we wish to develop teacher learning that is focused on developing inclusive practice that we should focus professional development on values and beliefs. Such development should aim to build the capacity and confidence of teachers to recognise that they can use and extend their existing pedagogical knowledge to support *all* learners, rather than thinking they require additional knowledge that is different to support particular learners (STEC, 2014). In other words, professional development for instrumental instructors should focus on addressing attitudinal barriers and develop a pedagogy that is inclusive of everyone rather than on identifying and responding to particular categories and groups of learners.

'Play On' -- an example of inclusive practice

A programme which exemplifies this model of professional development is run by Paragon Music (Levy, Robb, Jindal-Snape, 2014). Play On provides instrumental lessons for children with additional support needs. Its philosophy is that the knowledge tutors have for instrumental teaching is valid for *all* learners. Teachers learn to respond and support at the level of the individual by reflecting on the interaction. The capacity to support all learners is through this reflective process with the focus placed on the *teaching* rather than on the teacher. The teacher uses and adapts his / her knowledge of the instrument and of teaching to support the individual child rather than focusing on how a child with a particular syndrome or condition might be taught.

Inclusive practice is better supported by helping teachers to recognise and apply their domain specific knowledge rather than focusing on particular categories and conditions. This has significant implications for the kinds of professional development that might be made available to instrumental instructors.

V Conclusions

This paper focuses on the school-based practices of Scotland's Instrumental Music Services and its aim to provide an inclusive service that widens access and participation in instrumental music-making for all children and young people. It is clear that the service, Scotland-wide, is committed to achieving this. Instrumental instruction is a limited and precious resource and the service is under pressure particularly where resource allocation and staff deployment is driven by an attainment raising agenda. Meeting demands and widening access and participation within existing capacity and budgets is challenging. Current selection criteria by aptitude testing is not an equitable solution to this problem. To help realise in *outcomes* the aspirational rhetoric of policy will require a clearer understanding at a structural level of the underlying processes that create the barriers to participation of children with ASN. It will also require professional development that addresses instructors' confidence and capacity to support all learners.

VI Recommendations

There should be a general principle that pupils' individual circumstances should not be a barrier to their ability to access and benefit from instrumental instruction. Scottish Government (2013). *Instrumental Music Tuition in Scotland: A report by the Scottish Government Instrumental Music Group.*

Every school pupil in Scotland should have the opportunity to receive specialist tuition on a musical instrument or in voice as part of their school education. Educational Institute of Scotland: *Charter for instrumental music* (EIS, 2010).

There should be 'appropriate and equal opportunities for children to participate in cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities' UNCRC Article 31 *'This article should be interpreted to include mental, psychological as well as the physical ages and capabilities of the child.'*

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About the author:

Lio Moscardini is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Strathclyde,

Contact details:

Dr Lio Moscardini

School of Education
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HaSS)
University of Strathclyde
Lord Hope Building
141 St James' Road
Glasgow G4 0LT

t: +44 (0) 141 444 8074

e: l.moscardini@strath.ac.uk

International Public Policy Institute (IPPI)

McCance Building, Room 4.26
University of Strathclyde
16 Richmond Street
Glasgow G1 1XQ

t: +44 (0) 141 548 3865

e: ippi-info@strath.ac.uk

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