

Post-primary music education in Ireland: Principals' perspectives

Marie-Louise Bowe

Columbia University (United States)

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate, describe, and understand the current provision of music education in post-primary (secondary) schools in Ireland as reported by school principals. Data included a large-scale national survey (n = 410) with a 59% response rate and 17 follow-up face-to-face interviews. The findings revealed how music instruction was provided for, in addition to principals' expectations of music programs and music teachers. Using a systems ecological framework, factors influencing principals' support of music in schools were also identified.

It was found that music education practices are inconsistent throughout post-primary schools to the point of insidious decline in many schools, as principals are not all exercising the autonomy granted to them to develop equitable curricula and music-making opportunities. Music programs tended to exist less frequently in all-boys' schools and in smaller schools.

Based on the degree to which principals demonstrated commitment to the implementation of music in their curricula, three distinct types of principals emerged and were categorized as the Progressives (managing schools with exemplar music programs), the Maintainers (struggling to develop music in their schools) and the Disinclined (unwilling or unable to implement music in their schools).

The majority of principals articulated high expectations for music in the school and communicated the importance of music in the curriculum for aesthetic, utilitarian, and extra-curricular benefits. However, principals' glowing endorsements of music education did not necessarily translate into action and implementation. Principals highlighted that the vibrancy of a music program is contingent upon recruiting competent, committed, and positive music teachers who act as evangelists for music. The absence of a clear and cohesive framework for principals from centralized government, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), is inimical to the development of music in schools; whereas creative funding, scheduling, and recruitment strategies facilitate the support of music in schools.

The primary recommendation resulting from this study is that a pyramidal governance structure is required so that the DES takes a stronger leadership role by developing relevant and cogent music education guidelines for principals and music teachers.

Keywords: music education, Ireland, post-primary, secondary, school music, principals

Prelude

Ireland is reputed globally for its rich arts and culture (Bayliss, 2004; McCarthy, 1999b). In his evocative speech at *The Music Show* in Dublin, the President of Ireland, Dr. Michael D. Higgins (2012), highlighted the centrality and significance of music in the lives of Irish people:

The music of Ireland, be it traditional music or music written by today's Irish rock icons, is itself an area to be celebrated and held up as a sign of optimism. We have much to be proud of and on which to build. Irish musicians have made their mark on today's international stage; it is well recognized that the arts and culture are Ireland's global calling card and one of our world-class, distinctive strengths as a nation (www.president.ie).

McCarthy (1990, 1999b) illuminates the existing paradox between the positive image that Irish music and musicians have earned internationally and the dominant perception in Ireland that an equitable and effective system of music education is lacking. She further argues that the strength of music education in Ireland has traditionally been located outside the formal education system in community settings, private, and semi-private music schools.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES), the centralized national body charged with controlling the educational policies in Ireland affirms the centrality of the arts within education policy and provision, particularly during compulsory schooling. The White Paper “*Charting our Education Future*” (1995) states:

Artistic and aesthetic education are key elements within the school experience ... a good arts’ education develops the imagination, as a central source of human creativity, and fosters important kinds of thinking and problem solving, as well as offering opportunities to symbolize, to play and to celebrate.... The creative and performing arts have an important role as part of the whole school curriculum. They can be a key contributor to the school ethos and to its place in the local community (pp. 22, 50).

However, there appears to be inconsistencies between the practices recommended by the DES and the manner in which principals are interpreting the recommendations and implementing music programs in schools. With the aim of understanding the role that post-primary schools currently play in nurturing and strengthening the visions espoused by the Irish government, research was needed to investigate principals’ perceptions of music education’s value and their expectations of music programs and music teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate, describe, and understand the provision of music education in post-primary schools in Ireland as reported by school principals.

Research questions

To carry out the purpose of this study, the following four questions were addressed:

- RQ1. How did principals describe music instruction in their schools in relation to: a) Curricula & Scheduling b) Optional Music-Making Opportunities, c) Staffing & Facilities and, d) Budget?
- RQ2. How did principals describe their expectations of music in the school, its benefits, and evaluation criteria?
- RQ3. How did principals describe their expectations and required competencies of music teachers?
- RQ4. What factors impeded or facilitated principals in supporting the development of music in their schools?

Setting the scene: An overview of post-primary education

Post-primary schools, also known as second-level, or “secondary” in some countries, refer to schools serving the 12-18/19 year old age bracket. There are 696 post-primary schools serving 327, 323 students (DES statistics, 2013)—448 have a mixed student population, while 140 and 108 are All-Girls’ and All-Boys’ respectively. While there are technically five different types of post-primary schools, Darmody and Smyth, (2013) cluster them into three sectors, in accordance with their management and funding structures; (1) Voluntary Secondary Schools; (2) Vocational Schools/Community Colleges and (3) Comprehensive Schools/Community Schools.

Progressing from primary school (4-11 years age bracket: Kindergarten-Grade 6), Post-Primary education is divided between a junior and senior cycle of study. The junior cycle is a three-year Junior Certificate Program (12-14 years age bracket: Grades 7-9) and is currently in the process of re-conceptualization. Junior Cycle students study ten/eleven subjects and sit the first state examination, the Junior Certificate (JC), three years later. The senior cycle involves a two-year Leaving Certificate Program (16-18 years age bracket: Grades 11-12). There are three programs associated with this cycle, each leading to a high-stakes, terminal state examination. The most popular program is the traditional Leaving Certificate (LC), where students take a minimum of five subjects

at one of two levels, ordinary or higher level. This certification acts as the main source of entry to universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education through a points' system linked to grades achieved (Kenny, Larkin, MacSithigh & Thijssen, 2009). The senior cycle may be extended with an optional school-based Transition Year Program (15 years age bracket: Grade 10), aimed to bridge the two cycles. Depending on the individual schools, music curricula may be offered at Junior Certificate (JC), Leaving Certificate (LC) and Transition Year (TY).

Music in post-primary education

Schools are not obliged to offer music as a curriculum subject (Moore, 2012; Sheil, 2008). McCarthy (1999a) recognizes the “fractured continuum” between primary and post-primary music education in Ireland (p. 48). The absence of music specialists at primary school level means that students may often enter post-primary education without prior formal musical experiences, often “see[ing] music for the first time when they’re twelve or thirteen” (Nolan, 1998, p. 136). According to Heneghan (2004), this situation is virtually impossible to reconcile, given the current structural and administrative circumstances.

Post-primary music syllabi strive to provide an all-inclusive general music education for all students, from those with special needs to the very talented, whether or not they proceed to a career in music (DES, 1996). The central tenet undergirding the music curricula is the fostering of musical understanding through class-based active music-making—via three interconnected and essential activities: Composing, listening and performing (Paynter, 1982, 1992, 2008; Swanwick, 1979, 1992, 1994). These elements are subsequently assessed by “practical” (individual and/or group performance and memory tests), written, and aural examinations.

There has been a proliferation of students specifically taking the LC music curriculum. This number has grown from 900 students in 1996 to 6,220 in 2013 with 557 schools from a possible 723 offering music (DES Statistics, 2013a). Scores on these LC music examinations tend to be “spectacularly” high in comparison with other subjects (Faller, 2012). This is leading to a perception that music is an “easier” subject (Walshe, 2007). The increase in students choosing music as a LC subject could also be attributed to the “new syllabus” introduced in 1999, where 50% of student grades can be performance-based (Moore, 2012). Given that 99% of students choose this “performance elective,” commentators like White (2013) highlight the “stupendous” imbalance of this performance allocation to a subject, which cannot be pedagogically accommodated within the Irish school system (p. 13). Having serious implications at Higher Education level, there has been particular scrutiny and criticism surrounding this “new” LC syllabus. Moore (2012) and White (2013) are among the many researchers, who call for an urgent reappraisal of the syllabus.

Context: Introducing the primary players

The overarching construct of this study centers on the interplay between three primary entities: The DES, music teachers and school principals. Each of the entities identified has a definitive role in shaping the structure, content and quality of educational experiences afforded by the school. However, the principals are the central focus of this study as they are the key players who hold the most responsibility for mediating the recommendations of the state, school patrons, and the vested interests of the community; parents, students, and teachers (Cuddihy, 2012). These various players affecting the provision of music education, at various levels, ranging from national to

local will be viewed using a systems ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1970), as illustrated in Figure 1. This framework offers a broad, comprehensive picture of the multiple stakeholders and recognizes the interconnected relationships that exist between and amongst the various components of the environment. An overview of the three primary players will now be presented.

The DES

The Minister for Education is an official of the government and is accountable to the Irish Parliament (Dáil Éireann). Advised by the Secretary General, the Minister is vested with the authority to supply and implement education in Ireland. The state's role is to ensure access to education, which enables students "to contribute to Ireland's social, cultural, and economic development" (DES, 2011a, p. 3). While the DES was set up in 1921, the 1998 Education Act, provided for the first time, a statutory framework for the Irish educational system. This act provides the legislative outline for the devolution of power and responsibility for the management of schools from the Minister through partnership with patrons, who in turn are responsible for the appointment of Boards of Management (BoM). The BoM in turn entrust their power to the school principals (Cuddihy, 2012). Through various external departmental agencies such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the State Examinations Commission (SEC), the Inspectorate, and the Teaching Council (TC), the DES establishes regulations for school management, prescribes curricula, assesses student achievement and regulates the teaching profession. Even though 54% of post-primary schools in Ireland are privately owned and managed by religious orders (predominantly Catholic), the DES funds all of the 696 post-primary schools and remunerates teacher salaries.

The Music teacher

Post-primary teachers work 167 days per annum and are contracted to teach from 18-22 hours per week, with an additional "43 hours" preparation and planning per year (Government of Ireland, 2013). They are usually registered to teach one or two subjects of the school curriculum (Hyland, 2012). Of the 42, 396 post-primary teachers currently registered with the council—29,229 female and 13,167 male (personal correspondence, February, 2014)—there are 1,442 music teachers currently registered with the Teaching Council.

While little has been documented on the music teacher's role in Ireland, the DES (2008) states the job of the music teacher is, despite curricula and examination constraints, "to build the role of music" as a "living, vibrant subject" in the school (pp. 8, 24). Benson (1979) in his report on the role of the arts in the formal educational system, delineated two distinctively different types of music teacher in the post-primary school. The first is the classroom music teacher whose job is "to prepare students for the certificate examinations in music... and to train choirs etc." The "etc." is not expanded upon. The second type is the instrumental music teacher who is a "specialist in teaching one or more musical instruments who often works in a one-to-one relationship with a pupil" (section 4.19). Benson (1979) in another section of his paper claims that the needs of the talented music student cannot be met by the classroom music teacher. The instrumental music teacher would have a "much higher level of instrumental expertise" than does a classroom music teacher, but would not necessarily possess the same qualifications (section 2.13).

There are two pathways to becoming a post-primary music teacher in Ireland. The less common route is the concurrent model (B.Mus. Ed.) with 6% (n = 88) of music teachers currently teaching with this qualification (personal correspondence, February, 2014). Established in 1986, the B.Mus. Ed. Degree is a 4-year music education undergraduate degree, which integrates educational experiences into the entire degree program with a specific “performance” element (McCarthy, 1999a).

The second, more common route to post-primary music teaching is the consecutive model. While it is likely that the vast majority of cases outside the B.Mus.Ed., (n = 1342, 94%) would have followed the Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) trajectory, there are some teaching Licentiate Diplomas and other qualifications that have been recognized in the past. Additionally, there are a number of migrant music teachers who have alternative qualifications. Under EU Directive 2005/36/EC a fully recognized teacher in another member state is entitled to be recognized and practice in any other European country.

The school principal: The Janus of music education?

Principals in Ireland have “overall authority under the authority of the Board of Management (BoM) for the day to day management of the school” (DES, 1998, circular 4/98). The role of the post-primary principal has become more complex with a list of legislative acts passed since 1989, which regulate the day-to-day work of the principal. In addition to these acts of parliament, the principal’s work is governed by regulatory directives from the DES in the form of department circulars (Cuddihy, 2012). To demonstrate the pace at which circulars are distributed, Cuddihy (2012) goes on to explain that more than 450 circulars were sent to principals in the five years from 2007-2011.

Despite the absence of an agreed contract for principals, the responsibilities bequeathed by the BoM to the school principal can cause considerable stress to the principal’s multifaceted, highly pressured role (Condrón, 2010; Cuddihy, 2012; MacRuairc, 2010; OECD; 2008). Charged with the responsibility of scheduling and resourcing, the principal has to juggle between the positions of administrator, manager and leader (Condrón, 2010; MacRuairc, 2010; Sugrue, 2003b). They control the internal organization, management and discipline of the school, including the assignment of duties to members of the teaching and non-teaching staff (OECD, 2007).

Although the state pays for teachers’ salaries, principals have a large degree of freedom and autonomy (OECD, 2007; O’Toole, 2009; Stack, 2013). This is due to the “considerable buy-in by the DES to the idea of new managerialism” (MacRuairc, 2010, p. 230). In fact, by ways of “market place language,” increased competition and decentralization of responsibilities to the principal to create “market type” conditions, schools in Ireland are being pushed to become more accountable for student performance (Lolich, 2011; MacRuairc, 2010).

McNamara and O’Hara (2006, 2008, 2012) detail the increased levels of scrutiny and pressure on the principals’ shoulders. However, there is a “marked reluctance” among principals to set, monitor, and review teaching standards as they view this aspect of teaching as being the job of the external Inspectorate (Mac Ruairc, 2010, p. 243). Therefore, the Inspectorate rates schools on a scale of 1-4 as part of the Whole School Evaluations (WSE) and subject inspections, in an effort to become more efficient, responsive, and effective. These inspection reports are consequently published on government websites.

In terms of training and hiring, principals are recruited from within the teaching profession and there is no other requisite qualification (DES, 1998, CL 04/98). In other words, there is currently no mandatory qualification required of school principals other than the minimum teaching certification, allied with a minimum of five years' experience (Cuddihy, 2012). Furthermore, in congruence with Cuddihy's (2012) findings, *School Leadership Matters* (Leadership Development for Schools, 2009) reported that over half of the principals surveyed had no management training prior to appointment.

Reflective of international principal leadership literature (Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), principals in Ireland are vital agents for creating the conditions in which school reform and improvement can succeed. Their role impacts not only on the academic achievement of the students but also on student participation rates, their self-esteem, and general engagement with school life. Given that post-primary schools are in competition with one another for students, principals have the additional ability to manipulate the timetabling schedule to "influence learning," in accordance with their visions (Condrón, 2011, 2012; Cuddihy, 2012). Therefore, as summed up by the DES (2011b), "principals have a pivotal role in creating a school climate that supports teaching and learning" (p. 39).

Viewing principals then as the recognized arbiters of what constitutes the educationally and culturally valuable, they determine what is formally taught, to whom, when, and where. Condrón (2010) elaborates by stating that principals may assume too much authority and responsibility or conversely be prevented from discharging their responsibilities by a resisting staff or uncooperative BoM.

As leaders of learners, it seems fair to say that principals are in powerful positions and may use their power to enable or disable, to liberate or immobilize, to nurture or stifle music education in their schools. Therefore, as depicted in Figure 1, on the following page, it is fitting to interpret the two-headed image of "Janus," the ancient Roman symbol of beginnings, endings, change, and transitions to represent the possible multidimensionality of principals' positions. Symbolic of the guardian of gates, often depicted holding a key, the school Principal then has the capacity to act as the "Janus" of music education—to move music education forward or conversely, hold it back. Looking outwards to mediate the wishes of the DES and the BoM, patrons and the community on one side, and looking inwards to negotiate the needs of music teachers, parents and students, they are considered "key levers of change" in the Irish context (Byrne, 2011, p. 156). As mentioned, this framework as presented in Figure 1 acknowledges the inextricable relationships and links that exist between the components, and across the various layers of the context.

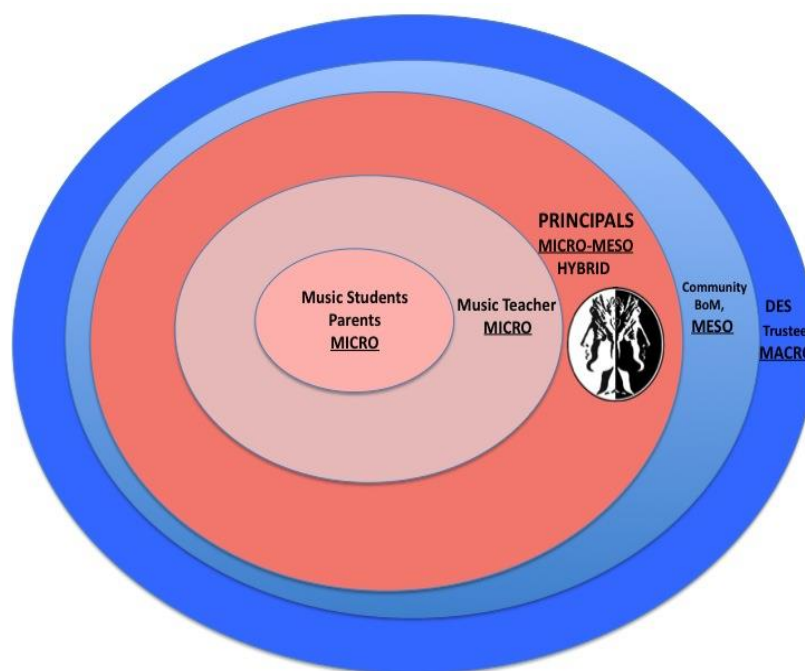


Figure 1. Ecological Model of Post-Primary Music Education

Conceptual model

Based on Lewin's (1917) field theory of psychology, Bronfenbrenner's (1970/2004) systems ecological model was originally used as a way to understand human development and to examine the different social and environmental influences on children's lives. Initially conceived as having five socially organized contexts or subsystems, it was viewed "as a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls" (2004, p. 5). Ranging from the inner most level, the micro-system(s), the immediate environment—school and family, to the outside, the macro-system(s), patterns of culture—the economy, values, etc., Bronfenbrenner's model is helpful to examine various layers of context simultaneously. This model will be amended in order to investigate the issue of music education in relation to a gamut of contextual layers and components.

In adapting Bronfenbrenner's (1970/2004) ecological model to the classroom, Johnson (2008) developed a socio-ecological model to investigate teachers' perceptions of the factors impacting their classroom teaching. He revealed that these factors could be viewed from three socio-ecological levels: micro, meso, and macro. Applying this socio-ecological framework in a similar way to investigate music teachers' perceptions, Abril and Bannerman (2013, in press) revealed that micro-level included those factors that directly impact teachers' day-to-day work in schools involving human agency and choice, such as scheduling, staff attitudes, and support from principals and parents. At the other end of the spectrum is the macro-level, which includes features that "affect the particular conditions in the micro-level" (Bronfenbrenner, 2004, p. 6). These are factors that silently impact the conditions in a school, such as national policies, societal attitudes toward the arts and the emphasis on testing (Abril et al., 2013, in press). According to these authors, the meso-level lies somewhere between macro and micro in that it is located *out* of the school context and does not include regular interactions among its agents (i.e., the school district in the U.S.).

As noted, a systems ecological framework was deemed suitable for this study on post-primary music education in Ireland. By socio-ecologically situating the principals on the micro-meso-layer, the factors impacting their attitudes and decisions to support or otherwise music programs and music teachers in their schools could then be located. Adapting this framework to the Irish context, a five-part concentric diagram was designed to illustrate the disparate layers considered in this study. The two inner circles, shaded pink refer to the immediate, *proximal-based* factors on the micro-levels, involving face-to-face, day-to-day encounters i.e. students, parents, and music teachers. The two outer circles shaded blue refer to the *nationally-based* factors on the macro-level i.e. the DES and trustees, followed by the BoM and the community on the meso-level.

However, on the periphery of the school, and situated purposely larger and “sandwiched” in the middle (3rd ring) of the diagram, the principals’ socio-ecological positions could be viewed as a hybrid—fitting within the micro/meso layer, linking all levels. Despite the presence of a school BoM (the principal is often the secretary of the BoM), post-primary principals have particular leverage. In some ways, their positioning could be compared to a school district administrator of the educational system in the United States. Looking outwards to negotiate the wishes of the DES, trustees, BoM, and community on one side, and looking inwards to negotiate the direct needs of music teachers, parents and students, despite their physical presence in the school system, they can be viewed aptly as “the middle-people.” Effectively, they are the connecting link, binding the micro, meso, and macro elements.

Research approach

A two-phased mixed methods approach was adopted for this study. Referred to as an “explanatory sequential design” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 81), the more expansive first phase included the distribution of a time sensitive national web-based survey to the entire population of post-primary principals in Ireland (N = 696). Of the 696 post-primary schools, 410 fully completed the survey (59% response rate).

This self-report instrument was designed by applying Chatterji’s Iterative Approach (2003). Given the aim of the survey was to measure the attitudes and behaviors of post-primary principals toward music education in Ireland, the survey tool was empirically validated. The final highly structured survey contained 46 items and was divided into four sections. Part I (“You and Your School”) collected demographic information. Part II (“Music in your School”) referred to the existing profile of music in the school in terms of curricula and scheduling; optional music-making opportunities, staffing and facilities; and budget. Part III (“Attitudes toward Music Education in your School”) and Part IV (“Attitudes toward the Music Teacher”) included a combination of close-ended, open-ended, ranking, and rating questions. Those not offering music as a general classroom subject were routed to the final section, “No Curriculum Music in School.” Consequently, the first level of analysis involved separating those principals who offered music as a curriculum subject (n = 307) from those who did not offer music on the curriculum (n = 103).

This first phase allowed me to acquire a more comprehensive aerial view of “what” was generally happening, as described and perceived by the principals before “zoning in” on more localized principals’ perspectives with the follow-up interviews (N = 17). Gaining a telescopic view, the interviews were treated as a way to investigate individual

school cases: to expand, explore, and examine the “why” and the “how” of what is currently happening.

Participants and recruitment for surveys & interviews

The database of post-primary schools in Ireland was retrieved from the DES website in May 2013. I undertook a 4-month process of updating and identifying the names and direct email addresses for the post-primary principals by phoning each individual school.

The final question of the survey solicited participants for face-to-face interviews that were held in Ireland in November 2013. As a way of understanding the survey data, the interviewee sample was proportionally representative of the survey sample (see Table 1). Post survey analysis, 30 potential follow-up candidates were identified from a pool of 94 willing principals. The purposive sample strategy used to identify the final 17 interviewees was based on the following participation criteria:

- Willingness and availability to meet in person from November 4 to 12, 2013
- School representation & geographic representation:
 - School type: voluntary secondary fee-paying, voluntary secondary non-fee paying, vocational, community school, comprehensive school, community college; irish-speaking school; boarding school; catholic school, protestant school; school with small student population, school with medium student population, school with large school population.
 - Student composition: all boys’, all girls’, mixed
 - School location: urban, suburban, rural
 - School region: leinster, munster, ulster, and connought
 - Schools with music and without music in the curriculum
- Diversity of principals’ perspectives: representing a broad range of principal experiences (from newly appointed to 30 years plus), expectations (from low, medium, to high) and atypical responses (outliers)

The following table presents an overview of the survey and interview participant population and sample according to school type, student composition, and school location. To demonstrate that the sample is generally representative of the population sample, the total population of the sample is also included.

Characteristics	Total population		Survey sample		Interview sample	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
School Type	696		410		17	
V. secondary non-fee-paying	319	46	180	44	8	47
V. secondary fee-paying	55	8	37	9	2	12
Vocational school & community college	228	33	129	31	5	29
Comprehensive school	14	2	12	3	1	6
Community school	80	11	52	13	1	6
Student Composition						
All-boys’	108	16	71	17	2	12
All-girls’	140	20	81	20	6	35
Mixed	448	64	258	63	9	53
School Location						
Rural	298	43	197	48	9	53
Urban	179	26	113	28	6	35

Suburban	219	31	100	24	2	12
School Region						
Leinster	341	49	200	49	6	35
Ulster	49	7	34	8	2	12
Connaught	100	14	66	16	1	6
Munster	206	30	110	27	8	47

Table 1. Survey and interview participant sample

Findings

The findings are presented in four sections. Part I presents the overall description of music instruction in post-primary schools in terms of Curricula and Scheduling, Optional Music-Making Opportunities, Staffing and Facilities, and Budget as reported from the surveys (N = 410) and the follow-up interview data (N = 17). The second and third part relates to the principals' attitudes toward music education and the music teacher while the final section addresses the factors influencing principals in supporting the development of music in schools.¹

Description of music instruction

Analysis of the curricula, scheduling, music-making opportunities, and staffing of music programs revealed inconsistencies in relation to how music was implemented across post-primary schools in Ireland. Music instruction was offered in 75% of the schools surveyed. The JC was the most common offering across all schools (98%), followed by the LC (91%) and the TY Music Program (81%). The JC was most commonly scheduled for 2-3 hours/week. The LC had the most variation in terms of scheduling with 33% of principals reporting scheduling music outside formal school hours as an extra subject. The TY music program was generally scheduled for two hours or less. Principals reported the most common optional music-making opportunities were Choir (84%) followed by Talent Competitions & Concerts (79%). Specialized Music Instruction was reported in 55% of schools and in 71% of interviewees' schools.

Over half of the principals (51%) in the survey, reported having 2 to 3 full-time music teachers while under a half (49%) had 1 full-time music teacher in their schools. The majority of principals (95%) reported having a dedicated music classroom and 57% had auditoriums. The budget as described by principals represented the greatest variation, ranging from less than E 100 to E 14,000 with nearly 20% having no specific budget allocated for music

Based on the degree to which principals demonstrated commitment to the implementation of music in their curricula, three distinct types of principals emerged and were categorized as the Progressives (managing schools with exemplar music programs), the Maintainers (struggling to develop music in their schools) and the Disinclined (unwilling or unable to implement music in their schools).

Attitudes toward music education

As outlined in Table 1, principals strongly agreed that music has a specific, necessary role in the school curriculum. The most frequently cited benefit of music in school in the survey was its contribution to a well-rounded education (37%), yet most

¹ Due to missing items in the attitudinal sections of the survey (parts II, III and IV), the responses of 298 survey respondents are reported. As the surveys were the primary method of data collection, these responses will be first reported followed by the interview data.

interviewees (76%) reported that the primary benefit was for the development of students' social/personal and emotional domains. All (100%) interviewees emphasized the crucial role of performance activities in the school, particularly in school liturgies.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements	SD	D	U	A	SA	M	SD
1. Schools have a responsibility to expose students to diverse music-making experiences	0 0%	8 3%	30 10%	143 48%	114 39%	4.23	.738
2. Music-making opportunities should be provided within the curriculum timetable	4 1%	26 9%	37 13%	155 52%	74 25%	3.91	.917
3. Music cannot demand the same significance as other subjects	169 57%	107 36%	12 4%	4 1%	5 2%	1.55	.784
4. Music at school can distract student academic progress	191 65%	89 30%	4 1%	2 .5%	11 11%	1.49	.875
5. Practical music-making experiences should be only taught during school hours	84 29%	157 54%	34 12%	14 5%	1 4%	1.97	.847

SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; U: undecided; A: agree, SA: strongly agree

Table 2. Expectations of music in school (n = 298)

While the majority (53%) of principals evaluated the strength of a music program based on the number of students participating as corroborated with the interview data (64%), emphasis on high student achievement in the state examinations was also prioritized by many (35%) on the surveys and 24% in the interviews.

Attitudes toward the music teacher

As presented in Table 3, the majority of principals indicated that they had high expectations of the music teacher, with 62% strongly agreeing the music teacher role is to ensure that music is a vibrant element in the school and should inspire students in performance-related activities. Principals indicated strong agreement that music teachers should volunteer their time to facilitate music-making activities after school (52%), as strongly corroborated by the interview data (94%). Nearly half (48%) reported that music teachers should be compensated for their extra-curricular efforts, as supported by the interview data (57%). These expectations were not consistently met across the schools.

In terms of music teacher expectations, music teachers should...	SD	D	U	A	SA	M	SD
1. Ensure that music is a vibrant element in the school	1 .5%	0 0%	1 .5%	110 37%	186 62%	4.61	.535
2. Have piano/keyboard skills	0 0%	10 3%	37 13%	101 34%	150 50%	4.16	.760
3. Regularly volunteer their time to facilitate music-making activities after school hours	2 1%	35 12%	63 21%	157 52%	41 14%	3.67	.881

4. Encourage their students to be comfortable at singing	2 1%	7 2%	28 9%	166 56%	95 32%	4.15	.738
5. Organize music performances for various social events throughout the school calendar	1 .5%	7 2%	9 3%	176 60%	104 35%	4.26	.661
6. Be active researchers in their classrooms	1 .5%	4 1%	24 8%	174 59%	95 32%	4.20	.665
7. Be comfortable using technology in their classrooms	0 0%	1 .5%	5 2%	141 48%	149 50%	4.48	.552
8. Organize regular music trips and workshops	2 1%	8 3%	27 9%	189 63%	72 24%	4.08	.703
9. NOT inspire students in performance-related activities	184 62%	92 31%	15 5%	2 1%	5 2%	1.50	.773
10. Be able to teach various instruments in their classroom (other than tin whistle and recorder)	2 1%	20 7%	59 20%	155 51%	62 21%	3.85	.850
11. NOT organize concerts or opportunities for students to perform publicly	175 59%	103 34%	14 5%	6 2%	0 0%	1.50	.685

Table 3. Expectations of the music teacher (n = 298)

The most cited essential competency for a music teacher was a positive attitude (37%), as strongly supported by the interviewees (100%). Positive attitudes were described as enthusiasm, passion, and most importantly, generosity and availability for extra-curricular activities, as noted by 94% of interviewees (compared with 14% of surveys). However, the musical skills of music teachers were noted by 15% of principals in the surveys, yet 100% of interviewees stressed the importance of high levels of musical skills, such as keyboard/piano skills (59%).

The quality of music teachers' qualifications was reported as the most important criterion for recruiting music teachers, as revealed by the surveys (47%) and interviews (59%), yet teaching experience was prioritized by 43% of survey participants and interviewees (35%).

Influential factors affecting principals' decisions

The primary factors impeding principals from fully supporting music in their schools were lack of funding (33%), as corroborated by interview data (88%), and lack of curricular time in the schedule. Lack of curricular time, according to 56% of surveyed principals with no music, was considered *the* most impeding factor. All (100%) interviewees reported the lack of support from the DES as a major impediment, while 41% stressed the impact of restricted teacher allocation and lack of student interest (59%, though merely 17% noted "lack of student interest" in the survey). Slightly over half (55%) of the survey participants indicated that the DES guidelines were regularly consulted, yet more than half (64%) of the interviewees noted that the guidelines had little or no impact on their ability to support music in their schools. The interviewed principals reported strategies to facilitate the development of music in their schools. Some of the more common strategies included: Creative funding (82%), developing ways to incite interest in music (82%), creative scheduling (70%), creative recruitment (59%), and creative interviewing techniques (12%).

Factors impeding the development of music in school	Strategies to facilitate the development of music in school
Funding	Creative funding

Limited curricular time	Creative scheduling
Restricted teacher allocation	Creative recruitment
Lack of qualified music teachers	Creative interviewing/ auditioning strategies
Assumptions about music	Innovative ways to incite interest in music
Music teacher workload	Alleviating excessive workload
Influence of teachers' unions	Creative ways to negotiate union rules
Lack of DES guidelines	Improvising and/or trusting the music teacher

Table 4. Factors and strategies impeding/facilitating the development of music

This study reveals a shifting music education landscape whereby the influence of boundaries between the traditionally impeding demographic factors is narrowing greatly. Although McCarthy (1999b) discovered that the provision of music in schools was historically determined by school type, gender of student population, and geographical location of the school, this study reveals the gender of the student population continues to be a factor in the implementation of music in post-primary schools. However the school type and geographical location of schools do not appear to affect whether music is offered. In fact, the size of the school, as determined by the school population is now a determinant element affecting the provision of music, particularly smaller schools (>200), as their ability to offer a wide range of choices is particularly restricted.

In summary, this study uncovered: (a) Various inconsistencies in the implementation of music in schools; (b) principals' varying attitudes and expectations towards music's position in the schools; (c) the breadth of professional competencies expected of music teachers as well as descriptions of the music teacher's pivotal role in the vibrancy of the music program; and (d) the multiple factors impeding and/or facilitating principals in supporting music in their schools

Conclusions

Based on these four major findings, the following conclusions are drawn.

Conclusion 1: Music education practices are inconsistent throughout post-primary schools to the point of insidious decline in many schools, as principals are not all exercising the autonomy granted to them to support and develop equitable curricula and music-making opportunities.

Echoing Dr. Higgins' sentiments, this research has revealed that we have much to celebrate in relation to post-primary music education in Ireland. However, although many students are benefiting from excellent music instruction due to exceptionally dedicated music teachers, others are not. While some principals like the *Progressives* are successful in implementing music education as illustrated by their exemplar music programs, others like the *Maintainers* are encumbered by what music curricula and music-making opportunities they can offer. Unfortunately, principals as represented by The *Disinclined* have stymied the implementation of music in the curriculum and are consequently denying students the opportunity to engage in meaningful music-making experiences in school. Schools with smaller student populations appear to be particularly disenfranchised.

Conclusion 2: Principals have high expectations of music in the school, communicate the importance of music in the curriculum for aesthetic, utilitarian, and extra-curricular benefits and generally evaluate the strength of the music program based on the numbers of music student participants. However, principals' glowing endorsements for music education do not necessarily translate into action and implementation.

The extent to which principals value music evidently affects their commitment to the subject in the school and so this research confirms that they act as arbiters of music education. Symbolizing the “Janus” of music education, the *Progressives*, typify the committed and visionary school principals who use their capacity to move music education forward. Conversely, as in the case of the *Maintainers* and the *Disinclined*, the disinterested, uncommitted principal can hold music education back from developing in the school. This study has not only highlighted the limited perspectives of some principals but has also sensitized a heightened awareness of principals’ needs and challenges.

Conclusion 3: Principals communicated high expectations and a breadth of competencies for the music teacher. They highlighted that the vibrancy of a music program is contingent upon recruiting competent, committed and positive music teachers who convey a passion for music to inspire students and act as evangelists for music. In schools where music is most vibrant, principals’ expectations of music teachers were clearly communicated and negotiated between the principal-teacher dyad so that music teachers were supported to successfully fulfill their roles. Such recruitment and support are not evident or are non-existent in many post-primary schools.

Allied to the point that well-prepared and musically-skilled teachers are the *sine qua non* of a vibrant music educational system, principals in this study highlight the “dual role” of music teachers in Ireland, i.e., assuming the role of the classroom teacher and the clandestine-like-extra-curricular instrumental/vocal music program facilitator/director. However, principals admit music teachers’ duties and responsibilities generally spill beyond their contractual agreements. These covert expectations are resulting in workloads of seismic proportions for music teachers. These demands have significant implications for the working conditions of music teachers. This study unveils the disjuncture between principals’ expectations of music teachers, the aspirations of the DES, the unions’ policies on working conditions, and how music teachers are prepared to fulfill their roles within teacher preparation programs.

Conclusion 4: The absence of a clear and cohesive framework from centralized government including lack of relevant and practical DES music policy guidelines for principals and music teachers is inimical to the development of music in schools; whereas creative funding, scheduling and recruitment strategies facilitate the support of music in schools.

No clear conduit of accountability and responsibility for the implementation of music in post-primary schools is demarcated. The fact that so many principals failed to consult the guidelines suggests they are obsolete. Not only are the existing guidelines undated and virtually extinct, the lack of support and cohesion from and amongst the DES’s agencies are fueling the confusion and ambivalence surrounding the implementation of music in school. This central issue is causing obfuscation and a careless neglect for leadership concerning an understanding of what constitutes music instruction and the music teacher’s role in school. Further, this void is jeopardizing the prospect of equitable music education practices while it is also preventing music from flourishing in all schools.

Recommendations

The aforementioned conclusions illuminate the fact that *all* stakeholders, inextricably interconnected and interdependent, are faced with the growing complex

situation of negotiating the implementation of music instruction in post-primary schools. A truly effective and comprehensive educational system can only be realized through a synergistic co-operation of key stakeholders, including national and local governmental agencies, teachers' unions and researchers allied with principal and music teacher associations. Therefore, new standards of alliances are crucial to generate a clear, unequivocal understanding of the role of the music teacher and music instruction in post-primary schools. Through collective energy and effort, collaborative dialogue, mutual understanding and self-interest, stakeholders, must engage in deep philosophical inquiry and debate to formulate official music education regulations and guidelines. Consequently, they will be advantageously positioned to advocate for the survival and sustainment of a vibrant post-primary music educational system in Ireland. For the purposes of this paper, the following macro-level recommendations are made to the DES and the Teaching Council of Ireland.

A pyramidal governance structure is required so that the state/DES takes a stronger leadership role in music education. Such a change would result in: 1) The delineation of a clear pathway and hierarchy of responsibility and liability for the implementation of music education; 2) the articulation of a clear commitment to the arts in the curriculum; 3) the formulation and formalization of relevant and cogent, official guidelines/regulations outlining a clear framework of good music education practices; 4) the preparation and support for principals to implement music in their schools; and 5) the channeling of funds through a ring-fenced funding model. The official policy document must be informed by evidenced-based, up-to-date, context specific research devised in concert with all stakeholders, including the Inspectorate. Subsequently, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) should administer this document to every post-primary school in Ireland.

The Teaching Council

The Council must be tasked with ensuring that all music teachers, both at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate level are certified. Given the vibrancy of music in school is contingent on competent and committed music teachers to “drive” the subject, it seems appropriate to address the issues besetting music education in Ireland through teacher education reform. Based on finding 3, the principals' high expectations of music teachers and the competencies required of them point to the specific nature of music teaching. Allied with my experience, the format and structure of the consecutive model of teacher preparation obviates the identification of appropriately prepared and recruited music teachers. Therefore, I contend that a re-conceptualization of the structure of music within general pre-service music education is vital. However, to successfully strengthen music teacher education programs, it is essential that music teacher educators from all universities work together as a cohesive unit, use their collective energy, knowledge, and experience by engaging in dialogue and collaborative exchanges.

As safe-guarders of future music teachers, I recommend that the Teaching Council is charged with the review of the Music Requirements for entry to the Teacher Education Programs. It is recommended that rigorous recruitment strategies, including the use of interviews and ideally a practical component, are introduced to ensure that prospective music teachers exhibit the requisite competencies *prior* to admission on Initial Teacher Education programs (ITE). Additionally, teacher educator providers should ensure that a discipline-specific supervisor mentors prospective music teachers. Essentially and most importantly, greater emphasis must be placed on developing the specific pedagogical content, knowledge, and skills required for classroom music teaching at post-primary

level. To successfully achieve this, stronger collaboration between Schools of Education and their respective Schools of Music in all universities is needed.

Coda

Carr (2007) prophetically warned against “teachers in schools all over the country being left to pick up pieces for public policy failures” (p.16). Indeed, this research not only confirms the severity of this reality for teachers but also for school principals, who have been charged with the arduous task of assuming a role requiring alchemic proportions. Most pertinently, while the majority of principals appeared to value music education in post-primary schools, we saw that the communication of support does not necessarily translate into actions due to a confluence of factors. Their hands appeared tied given the limited support from the DES *in addition* to the negative perceptions toward music as a school subject from the various stakeholders. Given the layered complexities involved in the implementation of music in post-primary schools and within the historic context of music in the school curriculum, we can merely begin to understand the paradox introduced in the opening chapter— i.e., Ireland’s globalized musical reputation despite the inequitable and ineffective system of music education in post-primary schools.

There is a looming danger that an over reliance on Ireland’s reputation as a musical nation is translating into the DES shirking its responsibility to provide equitable and meaningful musical experiences for all students. Given that the DES is not assuming moral culpability in this regard, it seems fair to suggest that the state is deserting its people when it comes to the implementation of music education in post-primary schools while perpetuating Ireland’s music education paradox. To metaphorically illustrate this point, I would like to draw attention to a new type of “vision” poetry that entered the Gaelic literary tradition in the 17th Century. This genre of poetry was described as “an *aisling*” (vision), where a beautiful “*spéirbhean*” (woman of the sky) lamented her betrayal by her rightful guardian and protector. The situation of music education in Irish post-primary schools as it currently stands resembles to my mind that of the beautiful vision abandoned by those in a position to nurture and protect her i.e. the DES. I fear that the existing void will be filled inevitably by less enriching music education pursuits leading to the “de-musicalization” of music students (Small, 1998). Worse still, given the deterioration of music at senior cycle, I am concerned at the possibility of music atrophying from the margins of the school altogether, falling completely into the laps of the private sectors.

To prevent the “*spéirbhean*” from languishing, and in order to fulfill President Higgins’ vision, we can only look forward in the hope that principals and music teachers can collectively advocate to all stakeholders and secure music’s *place de jure* in post-primary schools in Ireland.

Definitions

Ireland: Ireland in this case refers to the “Republic of Ireland” encompassing 26 counties. The remaining 6 counties, known as “Northern Ireland” are part of the United Kingdom and are not included in this study. Ireland gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1922 and comprises four provinces/regions: Leinster, Munster, Connaught and Ulster. According to Martin (2000), in comparison to other European countries, Ireland has a low rate of urbanization. It has five principal cities, i.e. with 40,000 inhabitants or more: Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford, and Dublin. Dublin is the capital city with 31% of overall population residing there. With a population of c. 4.5 million people, Ireland is a member of the European Union and is the size of the state of Indiana in the U.S.

Post-Primary Education: Second-level, or secondary schooling in this context refers specifically to schools serving the 12-18/19 year old age bracket (327, 323 students in total). Even though there is a total

of 723 schools listed as post-primary schools on the DES database, 696 post-primary schools are catering for this specific age group. The additional 27 schools are actually Schools of Further Education (35,524 students), customarily associated with Adult Education. These 27 schools were omitted from the sample resulting in a total eligible population of 696 post-primary schools.

Secondary School: The term secondary school has two different meanings in the Irish educational system. Most commonly, as noted above, it refers to post-primary education generally. However, it can also refer to a specific school type, often called a Voluntary Secondary School: These schools are managed and privately owned under the trusteeship of religious communities and were the main post-primary school type up to the 1960s. For the purposes of this study, I will distinguish both terms by using capitalizations when referring to (Voluntary) Secondary Schools. Otherwise, “secondary” refers more generally to post-primary education.

The Junior Certificate (JC): This is a state examination, which occurs at the end of the junior cycle. The junior cycle is a three-year program and caters for students typically between 12-14 years (Grades 7-9). This cycle is currently under reform and has been named the Junior Cycle Student Award, (JCSA): It will be implemented on a phased basis from September 2015. The learning at the core of the proposed new junior cycle is described in twenty-four statements of learning, which are underscored by eight principles. In this case, schools will have greater flexibility to decide what combination of subjects, short courses or other learning experiences will be provided in their three year program (NCCA, 2011).

The Leaving Certificate (LC): This is a high-stakes state examination, which occurs at the end of the senior cycle. The senior cycle is a two-year program and caters for students typically between 16-18 years age years (Grades 11-12).

Transition Year (TY): This is a one-year, optional, school-based program during the first year of the senior cycle. Bridging the junior and senior cycles without any formal examinations, TY provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs that include work experience. It caters for students typically 15 years age bracket (Grade 10).

Specialized Music Instruction (SMI): This refers to individual or group instrumental/ vocal instruction offered outside or within school hours, often using a rotating timetable to avoid undue disruption of lessons.

Professional Diploma in Education (PDE): This is the mandated professional certificate essential for post-primary teachers in Ireland, offered within Initial Teacher Education Programs. From September 2014, a two-year Professional Masters in Education will replace this diploma.

Music Guidelines: These guidelines refer to two specific undated documents, intended to guide music teachers teaching junior cycle (DES, n.d.a) and senior cycle (DES, n.d.b) music. Efforts were made to clarify the dates of the documents as well as to confirm the existence of updated guidelines for principals and/music teachers. I did this by contacting the Music Inspectorate. It was revealed that no such document exists. I suspect that both guidelines date to the early 1990s. However, the only existing DES document relating to music education practices comprises a report of 45 music department inspections. The two-fold purpose of this report was to present findings of current practices in schools and classrooms conducted during 2006 and 2007. The other purpose was to assist schools by raising awareness of the issues surrounding the teaching and learning of music.

Full-time Music Teacher: This refers to a whole-time DES-paid teacher who teaches between 18 and 22 hours per week. He/she may also teach additional subjects

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