

Children's Attitudes to Music

NEMP Task Reference
Music Survey administered to years 4 and 8

Roger Buckton

Introduction

Although the Music Survey was just one relatively small part of the nemp music work, its importance should not be under-estimated, for it is the first national survey of children's attitudes to, and perceptions about, music. In addition, it is a survey about their participation in music activities, both in and out of school.

It was only when all the data had arrived, that the extent of the information to be obtained from the survey was fully appreciated. For example, the survey as published in the NEMP Report 4 - Music Assessment Results 1996 did not contain all the questions as asked in the original survey. As such, it should be appreciated that this report uses all the data obtained from the survey and that question numbers refer to the survey as administered to the children, and so differ from those in the published NEMP Report 4.

Limitations

Taking into consideration the wealth of information seen to be available, emphasis was put on a presentation of the full amount of data as revealed by the survey. The nature of this work was seen as being in the nature of baseline work of considerable interest to other music education researchers. Not only are these results useful for music education studies, but they also bring an awareness that more information is available in areas such as those covered by the nemp survey. For example, the question on children's music listening preferences could be given a more detailed analysis and discussion than was possible in the current research work.

As other work in this consultancy was done on a variety of tasks, it was increasingly appreciated that a number of tasks had problems with establishing validity and proving reliability. Whilst the results as a whole develop a picture of music education at years four and eight, taken individually, less reliance can be placed on individual task results. This brings into question the usefulness of comparisons and correlations between one set of results and another, and was considered to be another good justification for presenting the basic data in this study, rather than moving into more complicated issues of correlations in music education.

Quite apart from issues of validity and reliability, there are other problems in placing too heavy an emphasis on correlations. For example, while the results of this survey might provide some interesting correlations, such as whether children who like singing engage in it more frequently, or whether children who learn the piano are more or less likely to think that they are good at it, the question must be asked how useful are such correlations? The old problem of cause and effect is an obvious difficulty. Correlations with other music tasks give similar problems. For example, if a positive correlation was shown between ability to sing in tune and preference for singing, can it be assumed that children who sing more accurately do so because they enjoy it, or conversely, enjoy it because they sing more accurately?

The music survey

Nearly 500 randomly selected children at each of the Year 4 and Year 8 levels answered nine questions. These questions are similar in pattern and scope to those asked in surveys for other curriculum areas, and in the 1996 NEMP assessment the same groups of children completed surveys on reading, technology and speaking, in addition to the music survey. The responses to all these surveys, if correlated, might supply invaluable information about the reliability of the results as a whole. Such a study fell outside the scope of this one, but may usefully be the subject of a future study.

The nine music survey questions roughly fall into four categories:

1 Children's attitudes to music

- Q.1 *What subjects do you like best at school?*
- Q.2 *How much do you like doing music at school?*
- Q.4 *How much do you like doing these things in music at school?
singing, playing instruments, listening to music or dancing/moving to music*
- Q.9 *How do you feel about learning or doing more music as you get older?*

2 How much time is devoted to music, in and out of school?

- Q.3 *How often do you do these things in music at school?
singing, playing instruments, listening to music or dancing/moving to music*
- Q.5 *Do you learn music or belong to a music group outside of school?
if yes, what do you do?*
- Q.6 *How much of your own time do you like to spend on playing music, singing, listening or dancing to music?*

3 Children's musical preferences

- Q.7 *Can you name some of the music you have enjoyed this year?*

4 Children's perceptions of their own abilities in music

- Q.8 *What are you good at in music?
Why do you think that?*

The unique nature of the survey, and the fact that it is the first of its kind on a national scale, means that the results of these basic questions were the main consideration. What do New Zealand children think about music in and out of school? How much time are they devoting to various music activities, and what are their preferences for various types of activities? Finally, what are their perceptions about what they are good at in music, and why do they think that they are good at it?

Results of the study

1 Children's attitudes to music

Q.1 *What subjects do you like best at school?*

TABLE 1 Preferred best three subjects ranked from liked best to liked least

Rank	Subject	Year four		Rank	Year eight	
		3 best choices			3 best choices	
			%			%
1	Art	342	(26)	2	246	(19)
2	PE	228	(17)	1	278	(22)
3	Maths	152	(11)	3	152	(12)
4	Music	144	(11)	5	116	(9)
5	Science	115	(9)	7	96	(8)
6	Reading	111	(8)	8	84	(7)
7	Writing	92	(7)	7	69	(5)
8	Technology	77	(6)	4	128	(9)
9	Maori	38	(3)	10	55	(4)
10	Social studies	18	(1)	6	71	(5)
11	health	12	(1)	n/a		
		<hr/>			<hr/>	
		1329			129	

Q.2 *How much do you like doing music at school?*

TABLE 2 Enjoyment of music at school

	Year four	Year eight
	%	%
Enjoy very much	49.3	34.1
Enjoy	36.8	48.7
Don't enjoy	8.1	12.2
Dislike	4.9	4.7
Unknown*	0.9	0.3

* The "unknown" response category has been included in tables such as the above when there is a possibility that it could be an influence on the interpretation of the results.

Q.4 *How much do you like doing these things in music at school?
singing, playing instruments; listening to music; dancing/moving to music*

TABLE 3 Children's preferences for various types of school music activities

	Year four		Year eight	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
	%	%	%	%
Singing	83.3	16.7	74.0	26.0
Playing	87.6	12.4	79.8	20.2
Listening	85.4	15.6	93.1	6.9
Dancing/moving	65.3	34.7	59.0	41.0

Q.9 *How do you feel about learning or doing more music as you get older?*

TABLE 4 Attitude to music activities later in life

	Year four	Year eight
	%	%
Very happy	56.7	48.3
Happy	29.6	37.3
Unhappy	9.0	10.1
Very unhappy	4.1	2.4
No response	.6	1.9

Comments on children's attitudes to music

In answer to Q.2, as the NEMP Report 4: Music 1996 (p46) notes, "Year 4 students were generally very positive about doing music at school. Half chose the highest rating for the first question (about liking to do music at school)." The Music Report in Forum Comment (July 1997) notes, "Music ranks among the five most popular school subjects for Year 4 students. Overall, Year 4 and Year 8 students indicate that music is quite a popular school subject."

These comments present music in a reasonably favourable light; but there are some grounds for concern. When one compares changing attitudes to a subject from Year 4 to Year 8, significant changes in attitude or popularity might be caused by child developmental factors as much as the school programme. For example, a most noticeable change in the popularity ratings occurs between art and physical education. Table 1 shows that art was ranked first by Year 4 children (26%) as one of the three most popular subjects, while physical education was ranked second (17%). By Year 8, the rankings had reversed. Physical education was first (22%) and art was second (19%). Ted Bracey (1997) wrote that "New Zealand art education is arguably the best in the world" and if subject popularity is an indicator of that success, undoubtedly these NEMP statistics would support that view. However, should art educators be concerned that physical education has become more popular by Year 8? It could be that maturational factors have a strong influence. Perhaps the popularity of physical education is strongly influenced by the onset of adolescence.

The influence of these maturational factors could also be significant in the case of music. Indeed, the possible influence of a teenage sub-culture is shown in Table 8. Even at Year 4, 71.7% of children stated that they liked to spend "heaps" or a "medium amount" of their own time on music activities; but by Year 8, this had risen to 87.9%. Unfortunately, the questionnaire did not ask about the nature of those activities, although Q.3 gives an indication that at least in school music, listening is the only activity which rises in popularity between Years 4 and 8. By Year 8, 93.1% responded positively to listening activities - ahead of singing - 74.0%, playing - 79.8% and dancing/moving - 59%. Increased music activity outside school is also demonstrated by table 6. 25% of Year 4 children learned music or belonged to a music group outside school. By Year 8, this had increased to 30%.

Given this evidence about an increase in musical interest outside school, it is surely of concern that in school, music loses popularity from 4th to 5th place behind art, physical education and maths at Year 4 and in addition, technology at Year 8. In addition, if one believes that there is a significant element of "enjoyment" in the aims of aesthetic subjects such as art and music, then popularity and enjoyment are important indicators of success. Indeed, the aims and objectives section of the syllabus for schools, music education, early childhood to form seven (1989) states that students should "enjoy performing music" and "substantial aural development ... Is the basis for enjoyable and worthwhile musical experiences." should not the very nature of the subject mean that music should be with art and physical education as the most popular subjects? If school music is not cultivating positive attitudes towards music what other purpose does it fulfil? It is true that 76.5% of Year 4 and 82.8% of Year 8 indicated positive attitudes towards school music; but the 16.9% at Year 8 who expressed negativity about school music is a concern because for them, school music is actually counter-productive to the aims of the syllabus.

2 The amount of time which children devote to music

Q.3 *How often do you do these things in music at school?*

TABLE 5 Frequency of school music activities

	Year four		Year eight	
	lots/quite often	sometimes/never	lots/quite often	sometimes/never
	%	%	%	%
Singing	56	44	52	48
Playing	25	75	36	64
Listening	55	45	65	35
Dancing/moving	33	67	22	78

Q.5 (a) *Do you learn music or belong to a music group outside of school?*

TABLE 6 Percentage of children who learn music or belong to a music group outside of school

Year four	Year eight
25%	30%

Q.5 (b) *If you learn music or belong to a music group outside of school, what do you do?*

TABLE 7 Children’s music activities outside school expressed as a percentage of all children who took part in the survey

	Year four	Year eight
Piano/keyboard	10.5	10.7
Guitar	3.8	6.4
Recorder	3.6	2.9
Dancing	2.1	.8
Flute	.2	1.5
Violin	2.1	.8
Singing	2.1	2.3
Clarinet	0.0	1.3
Rap	0.0	.8
	<hr/> 24.4	<hr/> 27.5

Some children participated in more than one type of activity. Up to three nominated activities were recorded, and these are all included in the figures in Table 7. Some children stated that they participated in music outside school (Table 6) but did not nominate the type of activity.

Q.6 *How much of your own time do you like to spend on playing music, singing, listening or dancing to music?*

TABLE 8 Amount of their own time that children like to spend playing music, singing, listening or dancing to music

	Year four	Year eight
Heaps	158 (35.5%)	179 (39.4%)
A medium amount	161 (36.2%)	220 (48.5%)
Very little	126 (28.3%)	55 (12.1%)

Comments on the amount of time devoted to music, in and out of school

It is well-known that singing at school can be a massed activity; for example, singing is a typical activity in school assemblies. In such situations, the objectives of singing have more to do with social and corporate spirit than musical ones. On the other hand, playing activities by their very nature tend to be more limited to the classroom. Similarly the more passive activity of listening can be easily taken with large numbers but dancing/moving tends to require smaller numbers to be manageable - although this is not always the case.

Could these reasons account for the differences in frequency of school music activities at Year 4 between 56% (lots/quite often) for singing, 55% for listening, 25% for playing and 33% for dancing/moving, and at year 8, 52% for singing, 36% for playing, 65% for listening and 22% for dancing moving? (Table 5)

These figures indicate a sorry state of classroom music in which it appears that a majority of children, at least according to their own perception, experience very little classroom music. For example, at Year 4, playing instruments was the preferred activity - 63% indicated that they enjoyed it very much; but sadly, only 25 % indicated that they did it lots or quite often.

Perhaps it is a factor that playing instruments and moving/dancing to music are most easily taken with good equipment and facilities, while singing and listening can be taken with minimal facilities other than the typical classroom resources.

Table 6 is more encouraging. 25% of Year 4 and 30% of Year 8 children learn or belong to a music group outside of school. These figures are in line with other surveys of music learning in New Zealand. For example, The Report of the Committee to Study the Needs of Music Teaching in New Zealand (the "Ritchie Report", 1980) found that 61% of 4th formers had learned an instrument at some time. In Music education in New Zealand (the "Tait Report", 1970) it was noted that 6% of primary students and 14% of intermediate students at the schools included in the survey learned from private music teachers.

Table 7 indicates the type of tuition or music activity nominated by these children. The popularity of the piano/keyboard continues with over 10% of all children at both years indicating participation. The popularity of the flute and clarinet learned by 1.5% and 1.3% at Year 8 is also encouraging. However, the decline in the number of violinists - 2.1% at year 4 and only 0.8% at Year 8 does not bode well for the future of orchestras in this country, and perhaps has been foreshadowed by the relatively recent decline in orchestras at the secondary school level, and the rise in the number of wind bands.

The responses to Q.6 given in Table 8 have already been discussed under "Childrens attitudes to music". Indeed there is a small ambiguity in this question. Is it designed to inform about the amount of music that children would wish to spend on music activities or about the amount that they actually do spend on these activities? Whatever the interpretation, it appears that children do indeed react very positively to music in their own time, and that it is a significant activity for the vast majority, especially at the Year 8 level.

3 Children's musical preferences

Q.7 Can you name some of the music you have enjoyed this year?
Name of the music - who performed or wrote this music?

TABLE 9 Children's choices for music enjoyed in 1996 - three nominations per child

	Year four		Year eight	
		%		%
Bone thugs 'n harmony	11	(1)	74	(5)
Peter andre	69	(5)	49	(4)
Fugees	6	(-)	25	(2)
Alanis morissette	25	(2)	70	(5)
Mariah carey	26	(2)	40	(3)
J'son	5	(-)	13	(1)
Other	392	(28)	579	(42)
No nomination	868	(62)	525	(38)
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	1,402		1,375	

Comments on children's musical preferences

As indicated in Table 3, Year 4 children expressed most enthusiasm for playing as a school music activity. However, perhaps due to cultural factors, by Year 8 this had been replaced by listening as the most preferred activity. Perhaps it is cultural factors also which cause as many as 41% of Year 8 to be negative about moving/dancing to music. A correlation with boys and girls would be interesting here.

Children's choices of music in 1996 are a study in themselves. If teachers believe in relating music experiences in school to the culture of the child, performers such as those listed in Table 9 should be well known to them. However, it is also true that the largest category in both lists is "other", and with the wide range of responses, an lacking an intimate knowledge of the "teenage popular song parade", categorisation proved to be very difficult. Some children nominated performers such as above; others only knew particular songs and were unsure about the names of the performers.

4 Children's perceptions of their own abilities in music

Q. 8(a) What are you good at in music?

TABLE 11 Childrens' perceptions of what they are good at in music - first nomination

	Year four		Year eight	
		%		%
Piano/keyboard	47	(10)	64	(14)
Dancing	50	(11)	27	(6)
Playing other instruments	126	(27)	128	(27)
Singing	144	(31)	83	(18)
Listening	18	(4)	60	(13)
Feeling beat/ rhythm	5	(1)	9	(2)
Other/don't know	35	(7)	36	(8)
Nothing	28	(6)	35	(7)
No response	14	(3)	24	(5)
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
	467		466	

Q. 8(b) *Why do you think that?*

TABLE 12 The reasons why children think they are good at a music activity

	Year four		Year eight	
		%		%
Enjoy it	53	(11)	93	(20)
Good at it	66	(14)	74	(16)
Has lessons/practices	70	(15)	105	(22)
Finds it easy	22	(5)	14	(3)
Listens often	11	(2)	17	(4)
Doesn't like it	5	(1)	8	(2)
Isn't any good	5	(1)	8	(2)
Has not had lessons	2	(-)	6	(1)
Other / don't know	183	(39)	105	(22)
No response	50	(11)	36	(8)
	<u>467</u>		<u>466</u>	

Comments on children's perceptions of their own abilities in music

Responses to questions about why children think they are good at a particular activity indicate an increasing awareness that enjoyment, talent, accessibility and practice are all factors in reasons why they are good at that activity. At Year 4, the percentage of "other/don't know" answers was 39% while by Year 8 that had reduced to 22%. At the same time, there had been a corresponding increase in percentages for "enjoy" 11% - 20%, "good at it" 14% - 16% and "has lessons/practises" - 15% - 22%.

It is quite difficult to interpret childrens' perceptions about what they are good at in music. The 10% - 14% for piano/keyboard lines up with the percentages for the number of children participating in this activity. The largest nomination is for "other instruments" - 27% - at both the Year 4 and Year 8 levels. This is clearly more than the percentage of children learning these instruments outside school, so perhaps the few schools that incorporate playing activities do so with enough skill and enthusiasm to give the children the perception that they are indeed good at that activity.

The effectiveness of the survey

It is appreciated that the surveys are cross-curriculum and designed to serve more than just the purpose of a subject survey, as has been the focus of this report. However, taking into consideration solely the questions and their responses in the music survey, the following comments are made about the overall design of the questionnaire and the questions asked:

1 Children's attitudes to music

Q.1 *What subjects do you like best at school?*

Q.2 *How much do you like doing music at school?*

Q.4 *How much do you like doing these things in music at school?*

- singing, playing instruments, listening to music or dancing/moving to music

Q.9 *How do you feel about learning or doing more music as you get older?*

Q. 1, 2 & 4 provided very useful data but Q.9 seemed to be measuring the extent of positive attitudes to music - not too different to Q.2 - and it achieved rather similar results. More useful could be an open ended question which followed on from Q.4 and about the particular music activities children enjoyed.

2 How much time is devoted to music, in and out of school?

- Q.3 *How often do you do these things in music at school?*
- singing, playing instruments, listening to music or dancing/moving to music
- Q.5 *Do you learn music or belong to a music group outside of school? If yes, what do you do?*
- Q.6 *How much of your own time do you like to spend on playing music, singing, listening or dancing to music?*

These three questions contributed some of the most useful data in the survey. In Q.3 it would be helpful to know more about the type of singing or dancing/moving activities, for example, classroom or massed singing. However, it may be considered that this is making the survey too detailed, and moving beyond what can legitimately be asked of children.

The ambiguity in Q.6 is a problem. Are children answering what they would like to spend but cannot, or simply what they do spend. The omission of the words "like to" would surely solve this problem.

3 Children's musical preferences

- Q.7 *Can you name some of the music you have enjoyed this year?*

Children completed a section of the survey form which asked "the name of the music" and "who performed or wrote the music?" The possible implication was that it was music which was listened to. It would possibly remove any ambiguity by adding after enjoyed "listening to this year." As noted earlier, an analysis of these answers by someone familiar with the teen-age "hit parade" in 1996 could provide some interesting insights.

4 Children's perceptions of their own abilities in music

- Q. 8 *What are you good at in music?*
Why do you think that?

Does this question really tell us anything? Whether a child is good at a particular activity so much depends on the opportunities provided to that child. Children can hardly be expected to distinguish between good and indifferent teaching and/or ample music opportunities and a paucity of such opportunities. What are we really trying to discover here? Is this type of holistic survey the time to be investigating quite subtle psychological questions?

References

- Bracey, T, 1997. "the new zealand curriculum framework and the notion of arts education". *Sound Ideas*, Vol.1, No.1. Christchurch: School of Music, University of Canterbury. pp.31-35.
- Crooks, T. and Flockton, I. "Music, Assessment Results, 1996". Dunedin: Educational Assessment Research Unit, 1997.
- Department of e=Education, "Syllabus for Schools, Music Education, Early Childhood to Form Seven". Wellington, 1989.
- Music Report in Forum Comment, July 1997. Dunedin: Educational Assessment Research Unit.
- Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, 1980. Report of the Committee to Study the Needs of Music Teaching in New Zealand, (Ritchie Report). Wellington.
- Tait, M.J., 1970. Music Education in New Zealand. Hamilton: Waikato Society of Registered Music Teachers.