

General Comparisons and Conclusions:

There is a strong consistency in all tasks to indicate that children at both years 4 and 8 hear, are aware of, and are more inclined to sing and play music in some form of patterning. Furthermore, in certain tasks, particularly in Keyboard Rhythms (Tables 15, 16 and 17), Keyboard Patterns (Tables 18 and 19) and Vocal Sizzle (Tables 20, 21, 22 and 23), the pitch and rhythm patterns coincided in nearly all cases. The listening experiences of children in a world of constant exposure to music are concerned with meaningful and integrated musical units, as in songs, and the phrases that make them up. When these are broken up into their raw components of, particularly pitch and duration (rhythm), along with texture and timbre, they can often fall outside the children's experience of what music is, so that, for example, a pitch pattern without its accompanying rhythm pattern becomes musically meaningless. A note in isolation, even when followed by another note in isolation, has little or no meaning. The same two notes in a meaningful context, however, become a single and more memorable musical unit in its own right. It was noticed that most children, when invited in Keyboard 3/48/O to explore the keyboard before starting the tasks, did so in patterns - playing scales up and down, playing the highest note followed by the lowest, playing rhythmical clusters or "chopsticks"-like patterns. In short, one must ask whether the ability to pitch accurately one note following another is a musical accomplishment. Similarly, one should ask whether the ability to sing or play a pattern of successive pitches or rhythms may not be the more truly musical accomplishment.

The study highlights the distinction between music learning and music experience. The NEMP project is concerned with "assessing and reporting on the achievement of New Zealand primary school children.."². The tasks are designed accordingly, and it is unlikely that in a subject such as music, that permeates the lives of children, in or out of school, that the project presumes to restrict its assessment to the school musical components. Music learning is a highly complex and multifarious process that takes many forms, ranging from developing the intense technical skills required for professional training in performance on an instrument, to the almost purely emotional experiences that are the basis of music therapy. Amongst these is the wide range of media musical experiences and casual musical tinkering that makes up the musical lives of most New Zealanders. To identify the musical factors that are effectively in the realm of normal experience as distinct, if indeed they are distinct,

² *Music Assessment Results 1996*, National Education Monitoring Report 4, EARU, University of Otago, 1997 p4

from those that are in the realm of music education, particularly in schools, is an almost impossible task.

It may be that the NEMP project has succeeded mostly in teasing out a few aspects of children's musical experience that they would have had regardless of anything that was done in their schools.

Imitating a fragment of tune that contains no musical meaning for the child can be little more than a mechanical process of a kind that the child has either learned to do or not. Some children were clearly able to imbue a musical fragment with meaning. This was often clear from an expression of pleasure that came on to the face of the child. For most, however, the task of playing the right notes on a keyboard instrument with which they were almost totally unfamiliar, or of singing by themselves some notes that had just been sung or played was an arduous job that gave them little pleasure or sense of achievement.

This, together with the difficulty children experienced in coordinating their pattern, tempo and pitch with those of the given model, often led them to simply go their own way. The outcome was, as seen in a number of the results of this study, performances that in themselves were good, but which failed to meet the particular NEMP criteria for success in those tasks.

The data collected in the various focuses of this consultancy open up many possibilities for other research projects. Perhaps some of these can be followed up subsequently. With music coming up as a NEMP subject again in 2000, it may be possible to keep in mind, when devising the tasks, such research spin-offs as this has presented, as well as benefitting from the present studies in refining their choice and design.