

## Music as a partner in Bilingual Education

A recent visitor to our school was Professor Nita Temmerman, Dean of Education at the University of Southern Queensland.

Professor Temmerman is a Music educator and researcher and in June this year she delivered a Professorial Lecture to the university on “Arts Education and its Contribution to the Development of Australia’s Creative, Ideas Economy”. Much of what the Professor said in this lecture is relevant to what we try to do through Music and the Arts at our school.

Our school has a large Music Department with over 40 music teachers, about 10 of them teaching Music in English. All students are expected to learn at least one and preferably two instruments during their time at the school and Music is an important part of the daily life of the school, starting from the kindergarten years.

You may wonder why, in a bilingual school, there is so much investment in and emphasis on music. Well, apart

from the fact that singing in English is a good way to learn English, music is also an important contributor to learning and the development of a competent, well-rounded and well educated person.

Some of the research that finds music to be a valuable resource in language teaching was discussed in an article written for Metro Life in late 2005 (“Music, Learning and Language”). In today’s article I wish to summarise some of the main arguments presented by Dr Temmerman from her research into the importance of music and the arts in everyone’s education.

In the *Champions of Change* study (1999) commissioned by President Clinton it was found that students who engage significantly in arts and music perform better than students who have little engagement in the arts on almost every measure, including reading and mathematical test scores. Continuing involvement in music is likely to improve a student’s chances of success in mathematics, reading, spatial reasoning, working with others and sustaining good personal relationships. Ongoing

participation in drama programs assists students' ability to solve problems.

An Australian study conducted by the Commonwealth Department of Education (2004) found that students' participation in music and drama programs helped them to plan and set goals, apply themselves more to their studies, enhance their self-confidence and work more co-operatively with others.

These findings clearly indicate not only that music and drama assist cognitive development and learning ability (reading and mathematics), but also the acquisition of important metacognitive skills (problem-solving, spatial reasoning) and citizenship attributes (working with others, sustaining good personal relationships). For any society and economy, these skills and attributes are very important. Yet they are readily available simply by doing what people love to do – playing musical instruments, singing, dancing and performing plays and musical comedies or dramas.

Through music and the arts we learn to appreciate and create things of beauty. They also identify our culture to ourselves and others. We know about the cultures of the past through the literature, paintings, music and architecture they have left behind. When we listen to classical music or folk music we imaginatively recreate the setting in which this music was played and the people who listened or danced to it. Were they wealthy people at a private performance by the composer or country folk enjoying the rhythms handed down to them by their ancestors? And what is the music itself conveying to us? Music certainly fires the imagination and in doing so stimulates the brain to greater cognitive flexibility. Indeed, the great German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer proclaimed music as the most noble of the arts, through which we directly experience the essence of the cosmos.

Encouragement of these skills and attributes are essential to the development of a "creative economy". For this reason, the government of Singapore in 2000 called on both the education and arts sectors of the community to

contribute to the building of a more innovative and creative Singapore economy.

Scholars have also spoken individually of the need to recognize music and the arts as important ways of recognizing and constructing knowledge. Howard Gardner, the author of the *Multiple Intelligences* framework, and the Project Zero group at Harvard University which he heads have shown how music and the arts draw on a wide range of intelligences and learning methods and naturally develop creative abilities.

The highly regarded scholar Elliot Eisner (2004) has found that participation in music and the arts requires the ability to make judgements where there are few or no rules, to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity and to construct imaginative responses to problems. All these are not only very valuable competencies for any young person wishing to succeed in the workplace and the broader settings of life, but are just what a nation needs in managing a rapidly changing, less predictable world.

One can see then why any school genuinely wishing to prepare its students for the future will give due emphasis

to the musical, dramatic and visual arts in its curriculum. Music is more than just a personal accomplishment through which one can entertain oneself and one's friends. It is a powerful generator of flexible, adaptive and creative forces for learning and for achieving goals in a complex setting, often where the co-operation of a number of people is required.

The benefits of having music as a partner in language learning have already been described in an earlier Metro Life article. Today's article has attempted to show how music and the arts have a wider benefit for learning and personal development. For these reasons, as well as for the sheer enjoyment and sense of achievement in being able to play a musical instrument or sing in a pleasing manner, our school has built up such a large Music Program and supports the teaching of drama, dance and the visual arts to the point that students and teachers could not imagine an education without a major contribution from music and the arts.

