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EDITORIAL

The hidden costs of educational reform: w(h)ither music education research in England

The *British Journal of Music Education* is, as it says on the journal website, '. . . a fully refereed international journal, which provides clear, stimulating and readable accounts of contemporary research in music education worldwide'. However, as is clear from the title, it does have a distinctly British flavour, despite being international in scope. Great Britain, as many of our readers will know, is actually a complex construct and encompasses England, Wales and Scotland, whilst the United Kingdom includes Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Each of these countries has its own traditions, policies and educational systems, as well as distinct musical cultures, which are celebrated and organised differently in each. One of the things that differs between the various countries is the systems of teacher education and training, sometimes called pre-service preparation in some places, and to be very specific, in this editorial, we are going to be discussing the situation that appertains in England.

Thanks to neoliberal education reforms, detailed with respect to music education so lucidly in these pages in a recent article by Susan Young (Young, 2023), in England, we are facing a potential problem with regard to the pipeline of music education research academics who are actually studying teaching and learning in music, particularly in the compulsory stages of schooling. The situation in England has been that music education research has historically been undertaken in two main arenas, these being university departments and conservatoires. The problem we are worrying about in this editorial is that in many universities, music education research happens – or in many cases, sadly, now in the past tense – happened – alongside, or 'on the back of' initial teacher education (ITE), ITE in the local parlance. Neoliberal education reformers are no fans of universities, and university education departments have been considered very poorly by those in power. As Susan Young observed, such neoliberal views have '. . . deliberately weakened certain sites of expertise that were, in the past, politically influential such as university education departments . . . ' (Ibid, p148).

Teacher *education* came to be referred to as teacher *training* – initial teacher training (ITT), instead of ITE – and it was felt by those in power that universities were superfluous to this endeavour. Indeed, ministers in the previous Conservative administration made no secret of the fact that they believed university education departments to be populated almost entirely by Marxists and worked to remove ITE from them. As a headline in the *Guardian* newspaper in 2022 observed, 'Government "pushing England's universities out of teacher training" . . . Higher education leaders say ministers think departments are full of "Marxists"' (Guardian, 2022). This was underlined when the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, penned an article in the populist right-wing newspaper the *Daily Mail* saying, 'Who are the guilty men and women who have deprived a generation of the knowledge they need? Who are the modern Enemies Of Promise? [*upper case in original*] . . . They are all academics who have helped run the university departments of education responsible for developing curricula and teacher training courses' (Gove, 2013).

As a result of these views, ITE came to disappear from some universities, and be much reduced in others as **the** a focus, and became, in many cases, turned into 'training' rather than 'education', and in which generic 'learning about learning' is often deemed more important than any subject-

specific pedagogic knowledge and understanding. Music education pre-service preparation, always a small endeavour, was often one of the areas that became unviable in the new financial climate. Due to music education research happening, as we said earlier, 'on the back' of ITE, this means that this expertise is disappearing from this part of English academe too. Added to this dispiriting picture, a number of universities have also taken the sad step of closing their music departments, from which a goodly number of graduates would, each year, progress to ITE. Now, those routes have gone, there is a diminished source of potential music teachers.

A possible saving grace comes in the form of music conservatoires, who are, by-and-large, hanging on to their undergraduate courses, and are increasingly working in the field of education research, not only with regard to higher level performing, but also for teaching and learning in music schools too.

But as Young observed,

> Neoconservative educational thinking thus embodies a curious contradiction. On the one hand, it emphasises the anti-intellectual, 'low culture' common sense of 'the people', but at the same time, values elite intellectual tradition and its high culture values (Young 2023, p149).

And this curious contradiction is where we find ourselves today, with a view that 'traditional' high culture is good and worth preserving, and that teacher education has been decimated due to educational Marxists. The reason for this editorial discussing these issues is that we are concerned for the future of music education research and music education researchers in England. Yes, there are people doing PhDs in music education, thank goodness, and there are academics who can supervise them. But we worry for the future health of the discipline if things carry on as they are, and we hope that we can soon turn a corner. It would be a shame if academic music education research in England is only being done piecemeal in a few isolated departments or conservatoires. We are holding our breath for an upturn in this, and look forward to a brighter future.

But although this sounds all doom and gloom, nonetheless music education research is taking place, we are pleased to report, and in this issue of the *BJME*, the diversity of music education is, as ever, threaded through the articles. We open with a fascinating article from Emma White and Stephanie Pitts exploring factors that influence continued musical participation after leaving school for young British adults. It serves as a timely reminder of the need to facilitate and promote clear routes into adult musical engagement and the challenges this presents; a point which is central to many of the other articles in this edition.

Kristian Tverli Iverson and David Herbert's research on the use of the laptop computer as an instrument, focussing on interviews and observations with five laptop teachers in Norwegian secondary schools, is the focus of the second article. It exposes multiple challenges faced by teachers and students and explores notions of legitimisation in relation to developing teaching, learning and assessment of music made and created using a laptop as the main instrument. Of particular interest from a UK perspective is the evolution of the Norwegian music curriculum and how the flexibility within this can facilitate diverse ways for young people to make and create music.

Moving to South Africa, Ronella Jansen van Rensburg, Ronel De Villiers' article *'NAOUIEDCT' and 'RCSSEOEUR': harmonising complexity in the South African landscape of music literacy education in secondary schools* uses an anagrammatic lens to explore 'the multifaceted landscape of music literacy education in South African secondary schools'.

The next two articles relate, in different ways, to 'creating' music. Vicente Castro-Alonso, Rocío Chao-Fernández's article is a provocation of the ways that teachers potentially diminish the importance of creating in order to promote importance within 'educational models that prioritise the development of musical interpretation skills'. It explores this within the context of Spanish

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secondary school teachers' preparation as teachers and their perceptions, practical skills and habits. This is followed by Jill Morgan's article, 'Career challenges: an exploration into potential barriers faced by Scottish emerging composers', which draws upon the perceptions of emerging and established composers to highlight challenges and potential solutions for composers in Scotland more widely. Like the article it follows, it highlights the lack of experience of some teachers to promote composing within their teaching and advocating the need for this to be addressed, as well as demonstrating many constraints on composers at all stages of their training and career. Teacher competence is also the focus of Kunyu Yan, Lei Wang's article, 'A comparison of teachers' musical abilities between public and private kindergartens in Qingdao, Shandong Province, China'.

The final two articles in this current edition concern gender. Eleanor Guénault, Jane Ginsborg and John Habron-James discuss gender ratios in brass bands, analysing statistics relating to gender ratios in brass playing across multiple contexts. This edition concludes with Catherine Goad *et al.*'s article: 'Gender representation in undergraduate music technology education: case studies from Aotearoa/New Zealand', which points to evidence of a gender imbalance in the music technology workforce and how this under-representation may be perpetuated through higher education courses in New Zealand. Both articles conclude with suggestions about how music education and the music industry can do more to support the under-representation of women in these fields of music.

So, although we may have concerns about the state and status of music education research in England, internationally we believe the situation to be much healthier, and we look forward to the English patient being restored to full fitness soon!

Martin Fautley and Ally Daubney

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