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## Wider Opportunities in Lambeth

Work with children and young people, a core strand of the apparently simple 'Blunkett Pledge' and other national initiatives – Music Manifesto, Singing Tsar and others – has presented music services and schools with a tremendous opportunity to re-embed music into the English national psyche. It also presents tremendous pitfalls if it is implemented poorly. Because of the large scale, high profile and the public attention on music education, either success or failure will be spectacular. Brendon Le Page, Head of the Lambeth Music Service, describes what his service is doing to meet these challenges.

**D**eveloping successful Wider Opportunities models is an extremely tough challenge. I would like to share the model we are developing in Lambeth, the challenges it has thrown up, and then discuss the pitfalls and possibilities presented by the nexus of Music Manifesto, Wider Opportunities, Singing programme, Pathfinders, Musical Futures, KS 3 Strategy, et al.

### Musitrax

This appalling neologism (coined by me in the teeth of vociferous opposition but with no suitable alternatives forthcoming) refers to a programme of universal entitlement to a thorough, sustained and co-ordinated approach to achieving a basic level of musical, vocal and instrumental literacy for all pupils in the borough.

### The Vision

We believe that singing, instrumental playing and a rich musical curriculum lasting several years and developing an ingrained ability, understanding and, dare I say it, love for music is the right of all children. We further believe that music can be taught – and caught – through any style, genre, or tradition,

as long as the commonalities, as well as the differences, are brought out.

### The Plan

#### **Musitrax Sing! from Nursery to Year 2**

Lambeth Music Service (LMS) is supporting schools to deliver solfège-based

musicianship, including developing singing, pulse, notation and playing. We have produced a songbook and Kodály-based curriculum and teachers' guide for all Key Stage 1 teachers to use in the classroom, with training for teachers, school-based and online support and regular opportunities to

perform together in public – all free to schools.

#### **Musitrax Play! Year 3**

LMS has developed a whole class model combining a continuation of singing and solfège musicianship development with instrumental playing on recorders, glockenspiels, bass xylophones and djembe. This enables children to develop additional skills on instruments in a general way – controlling fingers and bodies, sitting, standing, blowing and breathing correctly, as well as learning to work in instrumental teams and playing and performing ensemble music in parts. New musical material and online resources and a continuing programme of training events have been developed to support teachers and pupils. Free to pupils – costs shared between the school, Standards Fund 116b and the Music Service.

#### **Musitrax Band – Year 4**

Here we are on what is now to many familiar ground – this is a development of the venerable SoundStart whole class wind band and string ensemble programme – closely following the recommendations in the



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Ofsted report on the original Wider Opportunities pilots – worth re-reading, by the way. This model has proved to be pretty robust and successful around the UK and therefore we have stuck with it, apart from modernising and refreshing the material and developing the teaching practice. It is free to pupils; costs are shared between the school, Standards Fund 116b and the Music Service.

to make such important choices is no choice or opportunity at all. So choice kicks in at Year 5 – now it's the duty of the Music Service with its partner providers (see I do get the jargon) to provide a kaleidoscope of musical offerings – whether for beatboxing, advanced classical saxophone, string quartets, occasional samba playing for fun, or guided rehearsal facilities for a heavy metal band.

After Year 4, Lambeth Music Service does not have the

## The Implementation

### Musitrax Sing!

Around three quarters of the Year 2 pupils in Lambeth took part in Musitrax Sing! in 2006–7, and 45 class teachers received two days training with Mary King, Laka D and others in voice care, solfege, singing technique and the repertoire. 2000 Year 2 pupils sang at the re-opening of the Royal Festival Hall.

### Musitrax Play!

5 pilot projects last year have grown into 20 projects this

headteachers understand the need and the benefit of music filling their schools. I suspect that the remaining third of pupils are not yet receiving a comprehensive musical entitlement. If we can demonstrate in the coming years the success and value of the Musitrax programme, some will sign up voluntarily. At some point the long arm of Ofsted may have to reach into these schools and ask about their provision.

You may notice – no vocal, keyboard or guitar Wider Opportunities' projects. I have taken the view that these instruments do not need to be introduced to pupils – for example there is already an overwhelming preponderance of guitar and keyboard pupils in the UK, and the vocal element is woven deeply through the whole five year Musitrax programme anyway.

I am taking this opportunity to introduce pupils in Lambeth to something they might otherwise never see or hear, still less hold, feel, own and love – the rosin dust on the rounded wooden curves of a violin, the interplay of mother-of-pearl, silver plate and brass on a trumpet, the feel of a vibrating piece of cane on the lower lip – real, tactile and emotional. When Wider Opportunities is over, and the playing field has been levelled out, the children can make intelligent, informed choices on whichever instrument(s) they would like to continue with, if music is their bag.

So, in summary, in Lambeth we are aiming for not just wider, but deeper, longer and further opportunities.



This five year musical entitlement is intended for *all* children in the Borough, including those with additional needs. Every child will have a sustained programme of real music-making, at least one hour per week for the whole five years. While it probably seems like a rather fascist, factory model of music education, when schools move away from this model, so will we! Also, I believe that giving 'choice' or 'opportunity' without providing children and parents with the information, background and experience

resources to provide all the pupils who wish to continue with all the options they might wish to choose from. Some options haven't been invented yet. However it is the Music Service's and the government's duty to ensure that pupils who want to access continuing provision, in whatever form, are supported to do so. LMS provides some options, schools and private organisations provide others. Parents, charities, the Council and the Government pick up the bill – enhancing core funding for the Music Service.

year – with a manual, teaching material, staff training and on-line resources – 600 pupils will benefit.

### Musitrax Band

14 projects last year have grown to 20 this year, with 600 new students playing wind, brass, percussion or string instruments in a band or string orchestra.

So around a third of all pupils in Lambeth are now on this sustained 5-year musical path. I suspect another third of pupils in Lambeth are getting a similar experience provided by schools whose

**Wider Opportunities: the Pitfalls**

**Elastoplast**

The shift in thinking required of instrumental teachers is huge. In spite of the enthusiasm and commitment and some support and training, I learned that this type of work places massive demands on peripatetic teachers.

They must learn:

- How to manage the behaviour of whole classes, engaging all the pupils all the time
- New and cunning ways of ensuring good instrumental technique, so it's established from the beginning
- How to differentiate the work for all children, from those with additional needs to gifted children in one class
- How to manage a team of adults – (in the good Wider Opportunities models anyway)

Much as I applaud the Government-sponsored OU/Trinity/Guildhall training programme, and much as I've tried to provide support for Wider Opportunities projects to music services around the UK, I am more aware than ever that this is an Elastoplast solution. Only in the UK can we possibly imagine that a couple of two-day INSETs and some online and face-to-face modules can adequately prepare teachers to do what music teachers in the USA spend four years at Music College preparing for.

**It is time that we stopped pussy-footing about and realised that until colleges and universities are able to offer rigorous, sustained four-year degree courses to**

prepare students for this work, perhaps leading to QTS, the Music Manifesto's



**pledge of workforce reform will not start to be a reality for instrumental teaching.**

Rider 1: Manchester Metropolitan University and RNCM's PGCE for instrumental teachers may be an honourable exception, but its still three terms as against four years!

Rider 2: I'm more than ever convinced that even the Elastoplast solution, coupled with a lot of mentoring, support and experience, will begin to make a significant improvement to the quality of instrumental teaching, especially group teaching.

**We've all been here before.**

Remember the **Maidstone Method**? The glorious world-leading class violin system developed in the UK nearly 120 years ago and emulated and improved on by Albert G. Mitchell in Boston, Mass. and plausibly even Shinichi

Suzuki, which at its height had 400,000 British pupils learning the violin? It

disappeared without trace in a few years after the Second World War. Three damning quotes on the Maidstone Method:

- 'In view of the fact that the violin is difficult enough to teach



*individually to pupils with fair capacity, we cannot help feeling grave doubts as to the value of the ultimate musical result of this endeavour to teach anybody and everybody collectively.'* (1905)

- (cf. today's Wider Opportunities doubters)
- 'Common sense is to be applied to violin class-management, as in everything else, and the lack of its application has in some parts of the British Isles lead to the **discrediting of the whole system**. Begin the work on the wrong lines, and bad results build up a wall of prejudice that requires a lot of breaking down again.' (Percy Scholes, 1914.) (Could this be happening around the UK now?)
- 'What has become of this vast army of youthful violinists is not known, but that they should have been allowed to dissipate, regardless of potential talent, is **a blot on the escutcheon of England** of which we may well be ashamed.' (1938) (With the uncertainties

surrounding core funding of music services, this is where we'll be again in a few years' time.)

**Do we have to be condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past?**

**What are – and what are not – Wider Opportunities?**

Margaret Martin Griffiths went to great efforts in her report for Ofsted on the twelve pilot schemes, drawing out good practice and the common elements which made for successful Wider Opportunities programmes from the seven ‘high quality’ projects. However, I’m ashamed to discover that there are authorities and schools that have simply ignored these principles, which include – I paraphrase:

- **Simultaneous integration:** musical experiences + musical skills + specialist tuition
- **New partnerships** between school-based staff, music service tutors and specialist musicians – the best quality is when all three work together
- Acquisition of technical and musical skills is combined with **ensemble music-making** from the outset
- Pupils’ learning and standards are best when **high-quality music-making, good sound production, tuneful and rhythmic playing, effective and secure posture, hold and embouchure** is expected from the beginning

**Wider Opportunities Lite**

Here are some alternative approaches to Wider Opportunities I’ve heard about:

- One authority which placed a newly qualified

conservatoire graduate on her own with a class of 30 eight-year-olds with 30 clarinets – no training, support or materials. She resigned in a few weeks, I’m relieved to say.

- Some services offering ‘thirty kids, one hour, one teacher’. Where in this model is the ‘opportunity for classroom teachers and music specialists to learn from one another by

that should have been happening in music classes before Wider Opportunities was dreamed of. Is this really the best we can do? (I know we got about half of the money we need, but still, suppliers only supply what music educators buy....)

- Organisations offering Wider Opportunities as a solution for PPA time.

‘dumbing down’, ‘a flash in the pan’, ‘just one in a long line of government initiatives’ – I’m sure you’ve heard it.

What’s more, if Wider Opportunities isn’t an unqualified success, a massive opportunity to place music back in the centre of the national psyche will have been lost, and it will be decades before any government will touch music



jointly planning and delivering enhanced musical activities?’ (DCSF guidance on Key Stage 2 Wider Opportunities). As Simon Lock from Kent Music puts it, ‘Wider Opportunities is for teachers too.’

- A catalogue entry from a well-known UK supplier: ‘Ocarina Wider Opportunities Set.... for the cost of a single flute you can equip a whole class with their own ocarinas and music books’. (The next offer is 30 boomwhackers for under £70 as a ‘great, inexpensive way for delivering Wider Opportunities’.) This is the type of activity that is the bare minimum

Goodness knows it’s hard enough to persuade schools not to take this view, but starting from this premise?

- Organisations which are buying the cheapest possible instruments with the view that by the time the instruments are knackered the whole Wider Opportunities thing will have blown over anyway. What message does that send?

If we – FMS, Music Manifesto, DCSF, whoever, do not start setting appropriate and really high standards for the quality of Wider Opportunities work and start to move heaven and earth to achieve them, the gainsayers and doubters will be proved right – it is

services with a barge-pole. If we do not act firmly now, Wider Opportunities won’t be ‘Whole-Class Instrumental and Vocal Teaching’ (WCIVT) but will be a Class-Room Instrumental Music Ephemeron – a CRIME.

Oh, and before I forget on whose behalf I really wrote this article, hundreds of thousands of people (children are people too) will have been sold a pup – they will know it and they will never forgive us.

*Photos: Lambeth Music Service*