



# CHAPTER 1

## THE KEY CONCEPTS OF A MUSIC EDUCATION

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### **Music for all**

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We believe that the study of music should be a central part of every child's education. This opening chapter explores some of the reasons for this statement in light of recent changes to the National Curriculum in the United Kingdom. It argues for an approach to music education that is built around young people being actively involved in their learning. It will focus on five key themes or concepts that all music educators, whether working in a school, community or instrumental setting, could apply to their teaching and use to help plan a quality experience for their students.

### **Why should music be for all?**

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One of the major changes to the last version of the National Curriculum has been the writing of an 'Importance Statement' for each subject. These statements capture the intrinsic value of their subjects and present these benefits for young people in a very helpful way. Each importance statement is related to the overall curriculum aims for all young people to become:

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- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve;
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives;
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

The first paragraph of the Importance Statement for Music reads as follows:

Music is a unique form of communication that can change the way pupils feel, think and act. Music forms part of an individual's identity and positive interaction with music can develop pupils' competence as learners and increase their self-esteem. Music brings together intellect and feeling and enables personal expression, reflection and emotional development. As an integral part of culture, past and present, music helps pupils understand themselves, relate to others and develop their cultural understanding, forging important links between home, school and the wider world. (QCA 2007: 179)

This statement provides vital elements that justify music's place as a core part of any curriculum. Note the emphasis on its uniqueness, the role it plays as a key element in the development of a young person's emotional, physical and social development, the historical and cultural imperatives that have driven (or been driven by) music's impact on our world, and the ways in which music can provide a link between an individual and the wider world. For all these reasons (and perhaps many more that you can think of), music is a vital part of every child's early educational experiences.

But the Importance Statement for Music continues. A second paragraph begins to outline the particular benefits of a music education.

##### **What are the benefits of a music education for all?**

Music education encourages active involvement in different forms of music-making, both individual and communal, helping to develop a sense of group identity and togetherness. Music can influence pupils' development in and out of school by fostering personal development and maturity, creating a sense of achievement and self-worth, and increasing pupils' ability to work with others in a group context. Music learning develops pupils' critical skills: their ability to listen, to appreciate a wide variety of music, and to make judgements about musical quality. It also increases self-discipline, creativity, aesthetic sensitivity and fulfilment. (QCA 2007: 179)

This paragraph begins to apply the foundational ideas about music and its importance outlined in the opening paragraph within the context of a music education. These sentences emphasise several key words that will become important themes throughout this book. Firstly, note the phrase 'active involvement'. Music is best taught and learnt through a process of active participation within its different forms or processes. Also, note the references to individual and group identity and a sense of togetherness. The positive enhancement of these attributes is a particularly important consideration for music teachers. Finally, the last two sentences of the importance statement

make reference to a range of further skills that a quality music education can enhance in all students.

This important statement does, for all the authors whose work is featured in this book, exemplify the intrinsic benefits of a music education for all students in a very helpful way. We are used to hearing about the external, extrinsic benefits of a music education, e.g. learning a musical instrument helps you concentrate better, do better at mathematics, improve your literacy skills (BBC 2010). But how often can you recall the intrinsic value of a music education being promoted in discussions about education recently? This provides an excellent starting point and one that all music educators should be familiar with. Over the next few years it seems likely that music will need to fight its corner as a curriculum subject in our schools. Indeed, at the time of writing a new White Paper has been released (DfE 2010) and it seems highly likely that music will not feature as a subject within the National Curriculum from 2013. Be prepared to promote the intrinsic benefits of a music education for all at every opportunity!

The discussion so far has dwelt on some key justifications for music and music education. Perhaps you are wondering how this will effect or relate to your own emerging, or established, music teaching. As part of our work with the National Association of Music Educators (NAME) we were asked to try and describe what a compelling learning experience in music would be like. This took some of the key ideas of the Importance Statement and applied them, together with the Key Concepts (see below) into a practical statement about the characteristics of effective teaching and learning in music. The following statement represents our combined viewpoint. We are not holding this up as the answer! There may well be things here that you disagree with. Rather, we hope that you will want to think about it, unpick it and apply it to your own thinking about how you teach music.

For us, a compelling learning experience in music ...

... involves engaging with, enjoying and understanding music in ways that create meaning for each individual pupil. Music should be taught in ways that motivate and actively involve students, integrating the key processes of performing, composing, listening, reviewing and evaluating. The curriculum should allow pupils to personalise and take ownership of their learning experiences and encourage them to engage with and develop a broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding in a diversity of contexts.

Music teachers need to be skilful, imaginative and enthusiastic. They will embody and demonstrate these musical processes in various ways. They should explore opportunities to build cross-curricular dimensions into their curriculum in a way that reflects the specific needs and interests of their students. In this way, music is enriched and has even greater relevance for pupils. Through creative exploration, learning should be underpinned by cultural and critical understanding, empowering all pupils to develop their senses of self-discipline, aesthetic sensitivity and fulfilment.

Music activities should extend beyond the music department and permeate through the life of the school and local community. Compelling learning experiences in music become contextualised within pupils' own musical identities through encouraging them to participate in this rich network of school and community-centred musical activity.

## The Key Concepts: the building blocks of a quality music education for all

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While we guess that the majority of you who are reading this book will subscribe to the notion that a music education is important for all children, exactly how one should go about providing such an education is a matter of ongoing debate. Currently, there are significant and important voices calling for different approaches. As we discussed in our introduction, the next couple of years would seem to herald a particularly important time in the history of school-based music education for all.

What would your essential components of a school, curriculum-based, music education for all be? It is worth dwelling on this question for a moment or two before reading on.

The most recent National Curriculum for Music was introduced to schools in 2008, although it has not been taught to the entirety of Key Stage 3 until 2010–11. It identifies five building blocks on which a comprehensive, curriculum-based music education should be built. In common with every other subject in the National Curriculum, these building blocks are called Key Concepts. They are:

- Integration of practice
- Cultural understanding
- Critical understanding
- Creativity
- Communication

Each Key Concept is defined in the Programme of Study and, for ease of reference, is quoted below.

### 1.1 Integration of practice

- Developing knowledge, skills and understanding through the integration of performing, composing and listening.
- Participating, collaborating and working with others as musicians, adapting to different musical roles and respecting the values and benefits others bring to musical learning.

### 1.2 Cultural understanding

- Understanding musical traditions and the part music plays in national and global culture and in personal identity.
- Exploring how ideas, experiences and emotions are conveyed in a range of music from different times and cultures.

### 1.3 Critical understanding

- Engaging with and analysing music, developing views and justifying opinions.
- Drawing on experience of a wide range of musical contexts and styles to inform judgements.

#### 1.4 Creativity

- Using existing musical knowledge, skills and understanding for new purposes and in new contexts.
- Exploring ways music can be combined with other art forms and other subject disciplines.

#### 1.5 Communication

- Exploring how thoughts, feelings, ideas and emotions can be expressed through music.

(QCA 2007: 180–1)

Within this curriculum model, the Key Concepts become the essential building blocks of a music curriculum. Following on from the grand statements contained within the Importance Statement, they represent some concrete and practical ideas, or ways of thinking, about music education. Our argument throughout this book is that these Key Concepts are the starting point for planning opportunities for musical learning. As we will explore further in the following chapter, they are closely related to the Key Processes (which are the essential ways in which students should engage with the Key Concepts). Obviously, as with any kind of categorisation or schemata, there will be overlaps between various categories. But these Key Concepts are an essential tool so, for that reason, we will briefly take each in turn and explore what they mean.

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, ‘integration of practice’ reinforces one of the central tenets of music education. The integration of the musical processes of performing, composing and listening (together with, in this curriculum model, the processes of reviewing and evaluating), undertaken both individually and collaboratively, underpin the development of musical knowledge, skills and understanding. These ideas have a long history. Swanwick’s early work and ideas in books such as *Music, Mind and Education* (Swanwick 1988) have emphasised this holistic approach to teaching music. The precise learning processes within the music curriculum were contested in the very first National Curriculum, particularly in relation to the requirement for one, two or possibly three attainment targets (Swanwick 1992: 164–5). The holistic model of music education, where key processes are conceptualised as being fundamentally integrated, has won the day in the United Kingdom. Our model of music education is respected across the world to no small extent because of this. There is only one attainment target for music as a whole. The concept of a performance lesson without listening, or a composition lesson without reviewing and evaluating, is a misplaced one. First and foremost, teachers should ensure that the Key Processes of music education are taught in an integrated way.

Secondly, ‘cultural understanding’ provides a starting point for the music curriculum to explore how music functions in societies, both nationally and globally, and how this relates to personal identity and the development of

positive relationships with others. While reading the Importance Statement, did you notice the significant emphasis placed on the individual student, their emerging identity and sense of self-esteem? This Key Concept provides the link between the individual student and their relationship to the wider musical world, whether that be in their physical local community or through a virtual community that spans the globe.

'Critical understanding' is the third Key Concept. It has much resonance with terminology such as 'responding and reviewing' and 'appraising' which were key pieces of terminology in the previous National Curriculum. The skills of musical analysis and aural perception which underpin the process of making judgements about music need to be taught systematically by teachers. The precise skills that these include are open to debate although some important ones are mentioned later in the curriculum orders. One skill, the ability to use staff notation, is a frequent source of contention among music educators. However, the important point here is to emphasise that topics such as music theory, analysis and perception all have a part to play in a rounded music education.

The fourth Key Concept is 'Creativity'. There are many views as to what the term 'creativity' in education really means. Here, the definition makes a significant play on using existing knowledge and skills in new contexts and for new purposes. It also places an emphasis on creative cross-curricular links (an idea we will explore further in Chapter 3). This leads us to an obvious point. Which other subjects have 'creativity' as a Key Concept and how do they define it? Discussions with colleagues from Art, Design and Technology and English will lead to some imaginative links being made between subjects that will help students considerably in contextualising their musical studies in the broader curriculum.

Finally, 'Communication' refers to how thoughts, feelings, ideas and emotions can be expressed through music. There are obvious links here to the third Key Concept of critical understanding.

Following the Key Concepts, the National Curriculum for Music presents the Key Processes. These will be the topic of discussion in Chapter 2. For now, the emphasis is rightly placed on these Key Concepts which should underpin and inform all of the curriculum choices and teaching approaches that you seek to adopt within your teaching. While the 'Range and Content' and 'Curriculum Opportunities' sections of the National Curriculum give you specific examples of the types of musical activities and approaches that you might seek to utilise (and there is a degree of choice there between what you choose and how much time you spend on each), at the level of Key Concepts there is no such ambiguity. These five Key Concepts are, in our view, rightly considered as the cornerstones of an effective, broad and balanced music education.

## Summary

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It is important to remember that the latest version of the National Curriculum for Music is designed as a benchmark. It sets out a core set of values and describes the essential types of musical learning that all students should experience. The Key Concepts represent the essential core of this experience and should be your starting point in considering how to plan for musical teaching and learning.

However, the curriculum as a whole can, and should, be treated flexibly. Across the whole of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, there is now less prescribed content and an increased focus on the Key Concepts. This means that, if you feel it is appropriate for your students' needs, you can teach music by using any one of a variety of methodologies, e.g. the methods of Kodaly, Dalcroze, Musical Futures or the Secondary Strategy. Teachers should use this new flexibility to design and develop their own curriculum models that best suit their particular situations and their learners.

## Structure of the book

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In what follows throughout this book we will explore some of this flexibility and give you examples of what a music curriculum might look like for your school. The book is structured in three main sections.

### 1. Exploring music through the curriculum (Chapters 1–4)

This section considers the key curriculum frameworks that music should be taught through. As we have seen, these include Key Concepts and Key Processes (the focus of Chapter 2). Chapter 3 explores the ways in which a cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning in music can be beneficial. Chapter 4 considers how functional skills and personal learning and thinking skills can be taught through meaningful musical experiences.

### 2. Establishing music in the classroom (Chapters 5–9)

This section looks in greater detail at the Range and Content and the Curriculum Opportunities sections of the secondary curriculum for music, particularly focusing on those aspects which are new. The aim here is to explore how these aspects might be approached in practice. These chapters will outline examples and case studies and also recommend resources which are useful in helping teachers to implement these aspects of the curriculum.

Chapter 5 begins this process with the focus on musical performance. The challenge here is to provide a range of opportunities both in and outside the classroom for *all* students.

Chapter 6 explores the sociological impact of music, the role of the music industry and intellectual property rights. It demonstrates how these issues can be embedded in existing units of work and offer alternative ways of engaging students with these issues through digital technologies, role play and a range of resources being developed by industry partners.

While the use of technology has always featured in the music curriculum, the latest iteration of the National Curriculum emphasises the role of technology in musical performance. Chapter 7 focuses on a range of classroom activities which develop students' musical performance skills through digital technologies.

Opportunities to work with accomplished musicians who can model creative musical processes can be inspirational and motivating for students. However, this can be a difficult aspect of the curriculum to achieve with limited resources. Chapter 8 encourages you to use the full range of musicians available and provides a range of starting points to help teachers to develop these opportunities for students.

Finally in this section on establishing music in the classroom, in Chapter 9 the book turns to issues of musical leadership. Projects such as Musical Futures have shown that, when given the opportunity, students can become more independent in their music-making. This requires them to take responsibility for their learning and become musical leaders. Chapter 9 examines some of these approaches, and shows how performing and composing activities can be developed that facilitate musical leadership skills in a positive way.

### 3. Enriching musical models of development and assessment (Chapters 10–12)

The final section of the book explores two issues of significant importance to music teachers in recent years: musical development and assessment.

Chapter 10 focuses on how you can conceptualise and plan for musical understanding and development. Linking to a range of common frameworks, it suggests planning activities which will help you review your scheme of work in order to enhance the development of music understanding.

Assessment in music education can be problematic. Chapter 11 explores this topic in significant detail. While many of the processes outlined in the Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategy come naturally to music teachers, often they are under pressure to conform to excessive demands for data in school which has led to a focus on 'AfL' based on a misunderstanding of the level descriptors. Ways of recognising and collecting evidence of progress will be explored and approaches to assessment in KS3 will be developed.



Within the context of exploring musical progression after KS3, the final chapter will outline approaches to teaching the 14–19 curriculum which focus on developing students as independent learners ready to take ownership of their music-making.



### Reflective Questions

1. What is special about Music as a subject? Why do I think it is important for all children to study Music at school?
2. How can I begin to use the Key Concepts for Music in my planning of a unit of work at Key Stage 3?
3. What challenges has this chapter presented? How can I begin to change my own teaching practice in response to these challenges?

### Further Reading



Fautley, M. and Savage, J. (2007) *Creativity in Secondary Education*. Exeter: Learning Matters.  
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