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Motivation in Music Education

Topic:

AMEB Grades – What Does It All Mean?

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For almost one hundred years the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) has played a large role in the music examination of young Australian children. Although a great resource and an excellent addition to a comprehensive music program, many music teachers employ the AMEB grades inappropriately.

It has been a common misunderstanding amongst some music teachers that the only method of music education is to place students, year in and year out, through AMEB examinations. This was never the intention when the AMEB was founded in 1918.

One of its founders Dr Edward Harold Davis (1867-1947) expressed his concern that, *“many students are kept on the same three or four pieces for the greater part of twelve months, until all concerned (parents included) are sick to death of the dreadful monotony. This is not teaching. It is chaining the poor little victim to a treadmill, and I cannot imagine anything more destructive of musical interest.”* (Bridges, 2006:88).

In 1994 Bridges advocated that private music teachers are simply servants to the AMEB syllabus and unfortunately employ the AMEB syllabus as a means to justify what they do or teach. Furthermore, *“the examinations are used by many ill-equipped teachers as a means of reassuring parents they are getting value for money”* (Bridges, 1994:54).

Data from university lecturers in Australia suggest that the greatest concern was that the level of achievement indicated by the marks students obtained in music examinations (primarily through the AMEB) often gave a false indication of their actual musical abilities (Bridges, 1984).

It is important teachers and parents understand that music education is not all about grade advancement. Whilst success in music exams is a great achievement at any age and at all levels, it is not the reason for learning music nor for teaching music.

Children learn music because they want to have fun, music is something all children can relate to. The goal of music education is to enhance a child's life and provide a positive and life-long rewarding appreciation for music.

This ideology must be at the core of what we (music educators) do and all the other elements should be a by-product of that.

A child's music education should incorporate a broad and comprehensive program that provides children with every opportunity to explore all that music has to offer. Students should experience all styles of music and be exposed to music creativity, composition, improvisation, singing, aural training, music theory and music technology.

Music teachers must stop relying on the AMEB grades as a curriculum. The AMEB grades are not a curriculum and the sooner we understand this, the better. Studying AMEB grades should compliment a child's music education and a good teacher is one that can clearly establish the appropriate time when to include music examinations as part of the child's development.

As a tertiary music lecturer, I am always confronted with music students expressing their dissatisfaction with their experience undergoing AMEB music examinations.

The greatest tragedy with music education in Australia is that so many children fall *victim* to inflexible teachers, teachers that repeat the clichés they were taught, and teachers who's musical vocabulary does not extend beyond the AMEB syllabus. As a result many children quit their music studies by the time they reach grade two or three AMEB.

Pascoe et al (2005) indicates that the most common reason students gave up learning music is that they felt their lessons have become boring. Although a number of factors can contribute to students boredom with music lessons, the primary reason for this is that the private music teaching sector is out-of-date in terms of delivering an engaging contemporary creative music curriculum and fails to adequately promote current innovations in music pedagogy, and as long as the private teaching sector remains an unregulated industry, this trend will continue for another 100 years.

If not used correctly, the only thing the AMEB grades are good for is preventing students from pursuing their music education.

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