

Graham Welch



Chair of Music Education at the UCL Institute of Education, University College London, Professor Welch's main areas of expertise lie in musical development and music education across the lifespan, teacher education, the psychology of music, singing and voice science, music in special education and disability, and the wider benefits of music.

by ANA M. VERNIA

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Entrevista



Ana M. Vernia Mr. Welch, you have a great deal of research experience. Do you believe that there has been progress in musical education quality?

Graham Welch

Yes. The overall quality and quantity of music education both nationally in the UK and internationally are much greater than they used to be. Overall, more countries have recognised the contribution that the arts in general, and music in particular, can make to the holistic development of children and young people. There are still political challenges in some countries because not all politicians recognise the wider benefits of music to the development of language, communication, numeracy and social development. Music is valuable in its own right and also as a means to support other areas of development.

AV From your vision as a relevant member of ISME (International Society for Music Education), what is your opinion about the research that is usually done in Congress?

GW

The International Society of Music Education (ISME) provides excellent opportunities for musicians, music educators and music education policy makers to get together. Through the conference, they will discover what is happening elsewhere in the world and also share their own professional and personal experiences of music learning and teaching. People have lots of opportunities to develop and extend their thinking. This can happen through informal discussions and networking that take place over breakfast, coffee, lunch and in the evenings, as well as in the formal timetabled sessions (presentations, keynotes, workshops and concerts). New friendships and personal contacts will be established that can extend over many years because of shared interests. Research comes in many forms: personal, shared, based on the craft knowledge of practitioners, and through application of established and new research methodologies. When you have several thousand people together in one place over one week, there are many opportunities to learn and be excited by the work of international colleagues. **The mix of cultures is enriching.**

AV In Spain one has the real perception, that musical education is losing importance and is relegated to mere entertainment. How is the situation in the UK?

GW

The situation in the UK is varied. Traditionally, the so-called 'independent' sector (private, non-state-funded schools) have a rich music history since their inception in the mid-19th century. In these schools, music is seen as an essential part of children's learning, with regular opportunities for children to play musical instruments, singing in choirs and make public performances. In contrast, the amount and quality of music in state-funded schools is more variable. If the senior leadership team of the school believe in the importance of music, then it

is more likely that there will be good quality music education for the pupils. In addition, each geographical region of the country has a music education 'hub' which coordinates music across all the schools in the region. The music hub looks for opportunities to support individual schools in their music education provision and to enrich their music curriculum. Not all schools take this opportunity of help. However, overall, there is much more music nationally in schools and it is of a higher quality than in the past. There are also rich opportunities in the wider community for children and young people to be engaged in music. A recent national research initiative 'inspire-music' captured many individual case studies of high quality music provision from across the country; these included all age groups and many different types of music making. The cases can be found at <http://www.inspire-music.org> with lots of video examples. The case studies are presented using a common 'effective practice' framework to demonstrate why their music education provision is effective (see <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Byqrw9DGETAFY2hiMEtQRngzeUE/view>). This framework was created from research and the specialist knowledge of a national panel of experts.

AV Currently we are witnessing a growing panorama of didactic pedagogies and renovations. In your opinion, is there a real innovation in musical pedagogy?

GW

Innovation comes in many different forms. For example, there is evidence of innovation at an individual level, where a musician, music teacher, or non-specialist/generalist teacher adopts a new way of teaching music. There is also innovation evidenced in recent years in ensemble music pedagogy, i.e., small groups of children, or whole classes, learning a musical instrument. This is relatively new in the UK where customarily a child or young person would learn to play a musical instrument in a studio setting with a private teacher 1:1. However, with the international growth of El Sistema-like initiatives, the only way to provide large-scale, cost-effective instrumental provision, such as in East London where 10,000 children are learning an instrument, is by teaching the children in groups. This



type of provision has required the development of a different pedagogy. Tuition is usually provided by instrumental specialists and only a small proportion of these will have formal teaching qualifications. Nevertheless, the quality of their teaching can be very effective, despite the novelty of having to teach groups of children rather than individuals. There has also been official encouragement for music education from national Government in England with its National Plan for music in 2011.

AV SEM-EE (Society for the Musical Education of the Spanish State), affiliated to ISME, has the purpose of presenting some studies to the Spanish government on the benefits of the Music Education. Do you think that politicians are aware of the importance of music in education?

GW

As I mentioned earlier, the extent to which politicians are aware of the importance of music is very mixed internationally. There is a growing evidence base from empirical research studies of learning in music and learning *through* music. The special education sector has long-used learning through music to support children's development, such as in communication, social behaviour and motor development. There is evidence that music – as well as being important in its own right as a way of thinking and understanding the sound world – can support children's physical, psychological (including emotional) and social development. The weight of research evidence increases each week!

AV Your great research career has led you to inquire in different fields of Music Education, which of your research is of greater importance to you? And what impact has it had on society?

GW

One of my lifelong interests has been in children's singing development, not least because every child has their own vocal instrument through which they can engage in music. This research supported the design and implementation of the National Singing Programme *Sing Up* in England from 2007-2012, and the continuing work of the *Sing Up* charity in promoting singing in Primary and (now) Secondary schools (see <https://www.singup.org> for the latest news and resources, including its international take-up). At the official end of the original Government-sponsored programme in 2012, *Sing Up* had reached over 93% of schools in England, involving 4.2 million pupils. I am pleased that my (and my team's) research was able to support this innovatory national programme and to provide formal evidence of its impact, both musically and socially (see <https://www.singup.org/knowledge-hub/insight/insight-listing/hot-topics/the-benefits-of-singing/> and also <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00803/full>).

I am also very pleased with the on-going collaborative work with my colleague Professor Adam Ockelford of Roehampton University in the development of *Sounds of Intent* framework. This is now available for pupils and young people, parents and carers, in special education settings (<http://soundsofintent.org>) and well as in an adapted version for young children in pre-school and first school settings (<http://eysoi.org>). The original *Sounds of Intent* framework is now being used nationally in the majority of special schools in England and has also been translated into many different languages for use internationally, including Spanish and Catalan. The initiative has had an important impact on fostering the structured provision of music education, especially for children with special needs in the UK and worldwide.

Most recently, I am proud of my work in researching the impact of singing and music on young children with hearing impairment (see <http://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1179/1467010015Z.000000000276>). This research is ongoing and was the focus for a national BBC Television breakfast news film in December 2017, supported by broadcasts on fifteen local and national radio stations concerning the significance and importance of singing.

AV Finally, what do you think the future for Music Education?

GW

Virtually every culture globally has a rich musical tradition. The challenge for music education is to celebrate, promote, enhance, enrich and expand opportunities for meaningful musical engagement across the lifespan. We have research evidence of the intrinsic and wider benefits of music for all ages, from cradle to grave. Music is part of the human condition, it is part of our identity, of who we are, of where we came from and of what makes us special as a species. Music education will continue to have a positive future as long as we continue to seek opportunities to engage supportively and critically with each other and the wider population, and to research and disseminate the findings of music's value for everyone.

AV ARTSEDUCA thanks you for your time and your contributions.

GW

It is a great pleasure to have this opportunity to share my thoughts and experiences in music and music education with the readers of *Artseduca!* ♦

