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For Your Information

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Music and the deaf/hearing impaired student

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Early in 1998, Wendy Smith, who was teaching at Miami Secondary Special Education Unit, travelled to England as part of a Quota Australasian scholarship. She visited:

- *University of Manchester, Manchester*
- *Kirklees Media Centre (Music and the Deaf), Huddersfield*
- *Mary Hare Grammar School, Newbury*
- *Longwill School, Birmingham*
- *Royal Schools for the Deaf, Manchester*
- *St. John's Catholic School for the Deaf, Boston Spa.*

Wendy is deaf and is an accomplished musician. Her aims for the project were to:

- *expand her knowledge and experience of teaching music to deaf students*
- *observe and examine music programs specifically designed for the deaf*
- *see a wider range of teaching methods and strategies used in teaching music to the deaf*
- *share information gained with other teachers of the deaf*
- *gain information about areas of deaf education other than music.*

Wendy wrote a report on her trip and shared this information with teachers of the deaf at an AATD seminar in November 1998. Printed below are extracts from Wendy's report and presentation.



Extracts from Report – Music programs in 4 schools of the deaf in England 1998 **Wendy Smith**

Introduction

Most people believe that the enjoyment of music comes from hearing sound. But sound is only a part of music. Music is made up of several elements and aims. Music is about:

- expressing feelings
- conveying language and meaning
- enhancing therapies
- defining religious and cultural identify
- creating
- communicating.

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People (both hearing and deaf) have criticised deaf people who can play music. For example, Mary Hare Grammar School has experienced this type of negative criticism of its band. People have said it was cruel forming a deaf band and making them play in the public like 'performing monkeys'. What people must realise is that deaf people (in bands and others who play solo – like myself) choose to play because they enjoy it – one of the basic purposes of any music playing.

Music is a fundamental human activity and a unique way of organising, reflecting on and expressing individual or shared experience. People of all cultures have found the need to share ideas, thoughts and feelings.
(Birmingham Curriculum Statement of Music, 1995 as cited in Longwill School Music Policy Document, 1997).

One should not make a hasty judgement as to who can enjoy music or perhaps play an instrument. After all, music is a universal experience shared by ALL!

Even though the music program was my main focus of this trip, I observed other aspects of deaf education. I have included these observations for the interest of those involved in education of the deaf in Queensland.



Manchester University

At Manchester University, I met with my first contact of the trip, a lecturer who talked about the training for teachers of the deaf in the UK. We viewed videos of some music programs conducted with deaf students in some of the deaf schools in England. She put me onto Paul Whittaker (Kirklees Media Centre, Music and the Deaf) who subsequently helped with further contacts.

Another lecturer was an expert in the area of audiology and made some interesting and valid points about music and deaf/hearing impaired students. These points included:

- the piano keyboard gives a good available frequency range for many deaf people including the profoundly deaf
- the perception of music by different deaf people may differ because:
 - there are distortion effects of sensory neural deafness
 - many harmonies are not available so altering the timbre of a time or note
 - recruitment means that deaf people with sensory neural loss have a more sensitive response to an increase in loudness
 - the dynamic range of music is difficult for many to handle
- the need for a well tuned acoustic balance when presenting music to deaf students because of the danger of making it too loud.



Paul Whittaker at Kirklees Media Centre

Paul was a key person for two reasons:

- his assistance with planning my itinerary, contacts with schools and people involved in music and the deaf
- his work with Music and the Deaf, a charity set up in 1988 in response to requests about how deaf people could make and enjoy music.

Paul is profoundly deaf and is a brilliant musician. He plays the organ and the piano. He has set up a centre, run by himself and a secretary. He is so successful in what he does that he is booked up throughout the year! His work involves travelling around the UK presenting musical workshops in schools and signing theatrical performances. He has interpreted for *Westside Story*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Les Miserables*, just to name a few. He learns the lines of all of the performers and then signs the performance by memory. This is incredibly hard work and is time consuming. I went to see him sign *Westside Story* and it was fabulous (I even cried!) He was very expressive and his signed singing was very emotional. There were quite a few deaf people at the theatre as well. After the musical, he conducted a charity gig where the theatrical volunteers did some performances which were excellent.

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Paul believes passionately and strongly about making music fun and meaningful. He demonstrated some fun musical activities for me and this helped to open up some fresh ideas of what I can do with deaf students now and in the future. We have agreed to keep close contact as far as each other's work goes with music and the deaf.



Mary Hare Grammar School for the Deaf

Mary Hare Grammar School for the Deaf is a non-maintained residential school for deaf students aged 11–19 years. The school caters for pupils with severe or profound hearing losses. Prospective students undertake an entrance exam and interview. The school currently has 200 students. The method of communication used is auditory-verbal.

The music program

The music program follows the National Curriculum in England. The aims are to enjoy music and to develop and promote self-confidence and co-operation as a group. Music is compulsory in the lower secondary years and is an elective for the upper secondary years.

The program involves:

- a multi-sensory approach, i.e. use of music, videos and dance
- materials chosen by the students
- the acoustic environment set up carefully, e.g. semi-circle for discussion, positioning of students and teachers ensuring maximum lip-reading, use of group hearing aids, minimum background noise, wooden floors, quality speaker systems, and visual material for reinforcement
- integration with other subjects, e.g. *Romeo and Juliet* could be studied in English, Drama, Music and History
- trips to theatres
- peripatetic teachers providing instruction for individual instrumental lessons
- school band which travels around the United Kingdom and to other countries, e.g. America, Russia and Australia
- older students acting as role models giving individual lessons to younger students.

The piano, drums and clarinet are the most popular musical instruments being played.

In the band, the secret of success is how well the students play together. A lot of concentration is required by the students not to get distracted by the other rhythms and melodies being played by other musical instruments and yet, still keep in time with each other. By counting or tapping out the rhythmic beat, the students can do this. The use of drums greatly assists the band members. Students are positioned so that they can see the conductor and the other band members.

In one activity I observed, the students watched a Charlie Chaplin video and then added their own sound effects using instruments found in the classroom. The students went on to do their own performances incorporating these sound effects. The students really enjoyed this activity as they were able to explore and create different sounds and their associations with the immediate environment.

Music is used to assist speech training, e.g. breath control, rhythm and pronunciation of words. Music helps students expand their vocabulary knowledge, e.g. words from songs.

The teachers believe that music helps to develop residual hearing, i.e. training the use of the auditory pathway to the brain. In addition, the students are encouraged to use vibration to feel the sounds of music. Video, dance and any tactile stimulation help to build up a picture of music.

Observations of the school

Group Hearing Aid systems are used in the classroom. This is where each student has their own aid (looks like a pilot's headphone with a microphone on a stalk). Each headphone has been programmed according to the child's specific hearing loss (like programmable BTE hearing aids). Teachers have their

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own microphones. Each teacher has a small touch control computer on their desk. Control of headphones can be achieved, i.e. turning on and off the student's microphone or headphone from the teacher's desk.

In Assembly, care has been taken to ensure the speaker is understood. Six large television screens are rigged up around the room. A camera, situated in the middle of the hall, lowers from the ceiling and focuses onto the speaker's face. A special disk for TV captioning is prepared before Assembly. Most speeches are stored onto the disk and, during Assembly, captioning appears on the TV screens with the picture of the speaker's face.

Music is playing while the students assemble in the hall. The overhead projector is used to display what the music is. At times, the overhead projector is used for additional material that is not on the disk for the TV captioning.

I was very impressed with what I saw at Mary Hare Grammar School. The students are obviously confident in themselves. It was good to see severe and profoundly deaf students following through with the National Curriculum with no special considerations. As someone quoted, "Sympathy gets in the way of education of the deaf...Empathy by the bucket load (is required)!" I guess this is pretty true in most cases, and is certainly true as far as my personal experience as a deaf student and later as a teacher goes. It was a grand feeling to see the students' academic abilities and achievements. In addition, it was touching to see the staff so dedicated and motivated.

There was an intense awareness of the students' needs, including:

- attention in class time
- maximum understanding occurring between students and students and teachers and students
- group hearing aids in working order
- clear lip patterns
- the light and positioning of students and teachers being most appropriate
- absence of background noise
- clarity of speech
- extensive use of visual material, e.g. overhead transparencies
- rephrasing.

As far as the music program goes, it was fantastic to see the students enjoying music and learning to appreciate it. It is very encouraging to see a deaf band succeeding as it has done as I have always wondered how they kept in time with each other! Now I can see how it is possible. The students in music classes have demonstrated a wide range of musical knowledge which far exceeded mine, e.g. from musicians in history to the latest pop band.

What I have noticed is the importance the teachers at Mary Hare attach to rhythm. It is one of the most important foundations in understanding and playing music. Rhythm – everyone is either born with it or without it. It is not an issue of whether you can hear or not. If you were born with rhythm, it can be developed and matured. I know that I need to focus more on rhythmic activities (without overdoing it) to help develop that rhythmic sense in a fun and simulative learning environment where the students will want to learn.

Lastly, at Mary Hare, rhythm is also developed through singing. This encourages students to improve the rhythm of their speech and breath control. Overall, despite Mary Hare's success in every way, I am aware that this school is not for every deaf child. Every individual child is unique and this must always be taken into consideration.



Longwill Primary School

Longwill Primary is a maintained primary school catering for 60 profoundly deaf students who have other special needs. 75% of the students come from non-English speaking backgrounds and 90% from hearing parents. All of the students have some kind of language problem.

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The school caters for students aged 2½–11 years. The students are taught in accordance with the National Curriculum in England through the guidelines set out in the Birmingham curriculum statements. The method of communication used is British Sign Language (BSL).

The music program

The music program follows the National Curriculum in England. The early years, i.e. 2½–4 years, are not involved in the National Curriculum.

The principal, in conjunction with some of the staff and outside professionals, designed a music policy document in 1997. This is currently being trialed. I asked what they did when they found that the student couldn't follow the National Curriculum. The answer was "We are still experimenting".

The music policy document includes:

- a mission statement
- aims
- how the aims will be met
- how they will plan and teach music
- music and the community
- monitoring and evaluating
- roles and responsibility
- equal opportunities
- timing.

Paul Whittaker (Music and the Deaf) has done some music workshops in the school and demonstrated ways of using music with deaf students.

The early years mainly concentrated on enjoying music, exploring and experimenting with different musical instruments, developing rhythm, discriminating between fast/slow, loud/soft, long/short, high/low etc.

One of the activities I observed involved the students experimenting on different instruments. They were encouraged to play together as a group. No timing or rhythm was used as the primary aim was for them to be aware that they were creating sounds. A secondary aim was to follow the conductor's orders which were to play and to stop. The students were picked to play randomly or in sequence.

I also observed a different group. Different types of music were playing one at a time and the students had to discriminate between fast and slow. The students then played on drums playing fast or slow. It was interesting to notice that the students confused fast/slow with loud/soft. Lastly the students sat around the wooden table positioned in the middle of the room and played a rhythmic sequencing game of hand slapping on the wooden table.

Observations of the school

The Principal really cared about the students and loved talking to them. The students were devoted to him. I have never seen a principal so dedicated to his work and yet spending so much time communicating with the students. He was obviously proud of the school and was keen to show me around explaining how the school was organised. He has a strong belief in what the school is committed to.

I only had one day at Longwill Primary School so there was not enough time to note other general issues in the school.



Royal Schools for the Deaf Manchester

Royal Schools for the Deaf (RSD) is a non-maintained special school, registered as a charity, catering for students aged 5–19 year who are deaf with additional needs. The school has 84 students. The methods of communication used range from signing, Makaton, and pictures to speaking and tactile modes, depending on the need of individual students.

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The music program

The music program follows the National Curriculum in England adapted to the students' abilities. A musician in residence comes from the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester. The music program at RSD has aims that include communicating the students' needs and expressing their personalities through creativity.

I observed a music lesson repeated with two groups of very different ability levels. The lesson revolved around creating, imitating and graphic score reading. The RSD has a small basic program called *Aurythmics* which aims to encourage and improve the listening skills of hearing impaired students who can benefit from their hearing aids.

Observations of the school

Royal Schools for the Deaf was a very different experience from the other schools I visited in England. All of the students have severe or multiple handicaps and therefore the learning and teaching are much different. However, one must remember that the most important aim of music is to enjoy it. Of course, several schools have extra and slightly different aims for their music programs.

I was very impressed with the Gamelan (visual and tactile percussion instruments) from Indonesia. I experimented with the various instruments, mostly made of metal and wooden gongs, and found that they were all very satisfying and very fulfilling. You don't need to be musical to play the Gamelan. I personally found these instruments very powerful and rich in the sense of being very tactile, visually stimulating and within the comfortable range of hearing. They were also quite practical and mobile. Little did I realise how beneficial these instruments can be for deaf students (even for the most profound). Playing the Gamelan is a different experience as far as any common percussion instrument goes.



St. John's School for the Deaf

St. John's School for the Deaf is a non-maintained residential and day school for hearing-impaired pupils aged 3–19 years. The students have either severe or profound hearing losses. Increasingly the school is admitting pupils from all levels of education, including secondary pupils who have failed to learn effectively in mainstream schools and pupils from schools where total communication is used. The curriculum has a broad balance and delivers appropriate National Curriculum programs of study. The method of communication is an oral approach.

The music program

The school follows the National Curriculum in England with most assessment being undertaken by the school itself. The music program seems to be a mixture of Mary Hare Grammar School and Longwill Primary. It is not as full-on as Mary Hare Grammar School's program but not as simple as the program at Longwill Primary.

The head teacher does most of the music with the deaf students. She has written a program using the National Curriculum as a guideline. The areas are all subdivided (e.g. basic elements of music – rhythm, harmony, timbre etc.) and examples of each section were given. I was impressed with the written format as it was easy enough to follow – especially for teachers who may know very little about music.

The lessons I observed involved singing and keeping in time to the beat. In singing, the lesson concentrated on pitch. The students used a percussion instrument to play out the beat of the song they had learnt. Another group focused on identifying to which category an instrument belonged, e.g. instruments that produce only one sound and others that produce many sounds; again another category, e.g. instruments that produce a long sound and others that produce a short sound.

Observations of the school

Many of the schools of the deaf that I visited spoke highly about the Maternal Reflective Method used at St. John's. This is a special and very successful language and communication program for deaf students (as well as for students with language difficulties).

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I observed this method with two five year olds. These two students had a very good grasp of language and used almost perfect grammatical structure. Most of the work revolves around the student's environment and the student themselves. Personal reference is always made and natural conversation takes place at all times. This method was initially used with me by my mother when I was very young.

I feel this method may be a key or, should I say more correctly, an 'open door' to some of the language problems of some of my students and of course other deaf students around the state. This is an area that I am going to research and try with my students as I positively believe it can help improve their language skills (since I have been scrutinizing for so long on how to improve the grammatical area of language).

I was highly impressed and learnt a great deal about the Maternal Reflective Method. It has obviously worked well as the students had a very good language level and I would consider them to be on almost the same level as their hearing peers. The younger the student starts the program, the better.

Lots of visual and simulative language was pinned up around the walls.



Conclusion

This trip was so valuable, in fact, a lot more than I had originally thought. Not only has this trip assisted me in the area of music and the deaf but also in other areas of deaf education. It was a real 'eye-opener'.

The people I have been in contact with at the schools, university and other places have all been extremely helpful and went way out of their way in terms of giving up their valuable time for me. They have all given me so much practical information, ideas and inspiration that I can't wait to put it to good use.

A tremendous (and all the related adjectives to that word!) thank-you goes towards Quota for giving me this fantastic opportunity which otherwise would not have been possible. A thank-you goes towards Sue Cummins who originally gave my resume to Thelma Medcalf who then took on the much-appreciated responsibility in entering me in the scholarship.

I want to thank all the Quota people who have obviously shown real dedication and hard work in raising the money. Honestly, there are no words strong enough to express my profound gratitude towards the Quota Club for everything they have done. I had a very enjoyable time at the schools and it has been a wonderful learning experience.

THANK YOU



We thank Wendy for allowing us to publish extracts from her report. For further information, the website addresses of the places Wendy visited are listed:

- *University of Manchester, Manchester* <http://www.man.ac.uk/>
- *Kirklees Media Centre (Music and the Deaf), Huddersfield* <http://www.matd.org.uk/main.htm>
- *Mary Hare Grammar School, Newbury* <http://www.maryhare.org.uk/homepage.htm>
- *Longwill School, Birmingham* <http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/bday/>
- *Royal Schools for the Deaf, Manchester* <http://www.rsdmanchester.org/school/school.html>
- *St. John's Catholic School for the Deaf, Boston Spa.* <http://www.stjohns.org.uk/aboutp.htm>