MALTA REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Volume 10, No. 2 Special Issue, pp. 317-338
Faculty of Education©, UoM, 2016

Music in Maltese State Secondary Schools Developing the Syllabus and Raising Standards

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Abstract: Music is considered a multisensory experience which encompasses and focuses on listening, seeing, moving and the emotional aspect of the human awareness. All these elements are considered important in the music curriculum as they enhance, stimulate and develop sensory perception and psychomotor skills. The main objective of this paper is to present detailed and structured revisions to the current Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) syllabus so as to reflect the ideal principles and standards that are required at this stage. Apart from providing the necessary materials and resources to support both teachers and learners, a more comprehensive approach and holistic organisation is needed in the syllabus and music curriculum. This paper also aims to enable the SEC syllabus to help pupils attain and sustain the standards required by other European universities/colleges.

Keywords: music education, music examination, secondary syllabus, curriculum

Defining Music

> *"Music is a universal language that embodies one of the highest forms of creativity"*
> (National Curriculum in England, 2013).

In Western artistic traditions, music is considered a universal art form which functions in various ways. As it is defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* music that combines both vocal and instrumental sounds "produces beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion" (1992, p. 781). Furthermore, music not only serves as a means to entertain people but is also an art which motivates and enables individuals to enhance their artistic skills and creative talents (Maltese Curriculum, 2012, p.8). According to Davies (2012) "[music] plays a central role for adolescents in identifying formation and more

generally is treated as a significant measure of each person's individuality according to their distinctive musical preferences and tastes" (p.540).

Literature abounds with authors attempting to give meaning to music and with discussions around its function in modern society. According to Powell (2010):

> *"When it comes to music, we all have our favourites and intense dislikes, so no definition of music can include words like 'beauty' and 'pleasure.' All we can safely say is that music is sound which has been organized to stimulate someone – which is a bit feeble really... Thankfully, it is much easier to define the individual building blocks of music: notes, rhythm, melody, harmony, loudness, and so on"* (p.5).

Music in itself is considered to be an artistic phenomenon that interacts with and encompasses both the physical and emotional aspects of every individual. Such emotions go far beyond what the school can offer, where it stimulates and encourages individuals to be "very susceptible to aesthetic impressions" (Pitts, 2013, p.61). Elissa Milne (2010) explicitly delineates music as:

> *"[…] an immersive sonic and social phenomenon that is at once both physical and emotional. Communication takes place through the processes of musical creation, performance and response (processes which are by no means discrete from each other), and music carries multiple meanings, communal and individual, intentional and unpredictable. People turn to music every day throughout their lives to create a sense of identity, to connect with others and to express, reflect and change their emotions. Music is a pervasive feature of life. Music engagement both underpins and accompanies many of our day-to-day activities from our earliest years as well as marking the significant moments of individual and collective life." (n.p.n.)*

In schools, music can also be expressed as a cross-curricular subject that enables students to interact with various subject themes. The reforms that were implemented through the Maltese National Curriculum Framework in 2012, aim to develop individuals by enhancing their potential capabilities and skills as lifelong learners (Maltese Curriculum, 2012, p.3). The curriculum further promotes achievements that depend on features that encompass various cross-curricular themes, such as: "eLearning; Education for Sustainable Development; Intercultural Education; Education for Entrepreneurship and Creativity and Innovation" (ibid).

The Importance of Music Education

> *"Music is shown to be beneficial to students in four major categories: success in society, success in school, success in developing intelligence, and success in life"* (Petress, 2005, p.112).

Music education includes quite a broad spectrum of competences and the need to acquire knowledge about the subject. In current music education, expressive arts play a vital role in enhancing and enabling young students to develop their creative talents and skills. Through the interaction of different experiences within the expressive arts, students and young people are able to distinguish and identify their own personal emotional feelings and those of others. The expressive arts play an important role in every individual's life by shaping and developing social and cultural identity. Fautley and Murphy (2015) conclude that music education incorporates: "generative activities, such as composing and improvising, performing opportunities, and learning about and listening to music" (p.2). Subsequently, the learning outcome in the expressive arts "plays an important role in supporting children and young people to recognise and value the variety and vitality of culture locally, nationally and globally" (Maltese Curriculum, 2012, p.8).

Darren Henley, Managing Director of Classic FM and author of twenty books about classical music and musicians, states that children should develop a very basic knowledge of music from their early days at school to secondary level. This provides children with a broad perspective in Music Education which should consist of the five basic elements: performing, composing, listening, reviewing and evaluating (Music Education in England, 2011, p.11). Furthermore, Henley emphasises and recommends in his article *Music Education in England* that schools should incorporate "live music making opportunities and performances for children and young people" (p.13).

Apart from engaging students in demonstrating their creative abilities and aptitudes, music also fosters and helps students to achieve a better understanding of the subject, actively encouraging them to participate in a wide range of musical experiences. Through this kind of interaction students learn to create, perform and present their own personal activities in various contexts, either independently and as a group, or within and outside the school. "Music education at all levels must aim at encouraging the exploration of values, fostering imagination and creativity, developing practical and perceptual skills and promoting intellectual and aesthetic development" (Maltese Curriculum, 2012, p.8). Philpott (2001) identifies a number of principles that underpin good practice in music education. These principles include:

- *Music is an important symbolic mode for expression, knowledge and understanding*
- *Pupils should be given opportunities to learn how to use and understand musical expression*
- *Knowing and understanding is about building meaningful relationships with music both in and out of school*
- *Musical knowledge embraces many different traditions,*
- *Music needs to be taught musically*

In an evaluation of ways of working towards a graded examination, Sloboda (1994) argues that when students utilise examinations for intrinsic motivational purposes, these, in turn, serve to create an incentive to stimulate their learning outcomes. According to research, music education develops and improves various intellectual functions (Boss, 2008) which are directly related to certain school subjects, such as maths and reading. Moreover, music can have a positive impact on people's artistic development. In this regard, Howard Gardner, a cognitive psychologist from Harvard University, has provided proof that "supports the link between music education and intelligence" (ibid., p.6). Through research and experimental discoveries, Boss's research findings have shown that "removing music from school curriculums can be detrimental to students, that […] music has its own intrinsic value and is an end in itself, a valuable aspect of a child's education" (ibid., p.iii).

The Benefits of Music Education

Music is a language that assimilates and enriches the student's motor and cognitive skills. Through these learning domains, music education is considered to be a field of study that incorporates generative activities that focus on various elements, such as performance, composing and improvising music, learning about and listening to various styles of musical genres (Fautley and Murphy, 2015, p.1). According to Ken Petress (2005), the subject of music is an important tool in schools to enhance students' perspectives in every way, shape or form "physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually" (p.112). As a former editor of the British Journal of Music Education, Stephanie Pitts (2000) notes that "music education has been advocated only rarely for the acquisition of subject knowledge, but rather for its desirable cultural influence, its preparation for the profitable use of leisure time, and its development of sensitivity and imagination" (p.34).

The importance of music education in schools stems from its contribution to students' intellectual development due to the proven academic, social, and personal benefits that it provides (Kalivretenos, 2015). Research has discovered that music education facilitates learning in other academic subjects and enhances skills that children inevitably use in other areas. Schellenberg states that "engagement in music-making has been shown to have benefits beyond the development of a range of musical skills in children and adults" (Schellenberg 2004, as cited in Hallam and Kokotsakia, 2011 p.149), which tends "to be the result of gains in visual-spatial intelligence" (Catterall and Rauscher 2008, as cited in Hallam and Kokotsakia, 2011, p.149).

Research has found that certain areas of musical training can be tied to specific academic strengths, such as "transfer" of skills and knowledge. To

fully comprehend this concept in practice, Susan Hallam (2010) states that "transfer between tasks is a function of the degree to which the tasks share cognitive processes" (pp.5-6). This means that when two subjects are related, a greater transfer will ensue. This is demonstrated through the "correlation between rhythm instruction and spatial-temporal reasoning, which is integral in the acquisition of important math skills. The transfer can be explained by the fact that rhythm training emphasizes proportions, patterns, fractions, and ratios, which are expressed as mathematical relations" (Kalivretenos, 2015). In a study published in 2000, Ron Butzlaff concluded that music can affect improvement in various different academic subjects such as reading. Music education is a worthwhile investment for improving students' understanding and achievement in academic subjects (Kalivretenos, 2015).

The Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) in Canada has researched the various benefits of music education. It concluded that music education is considered to be "a powerful tool for attaining children's full intellectual, social, and creative potential" (2014, p.1). RCM's study confirms that musically-trained students develop their potential due to the fact that participation in music is intrinsically rewarding. When it is rewarding students are most likely to devote more time and practice "to develop[ing] strong cognitive and social abilities" (p.1).

Sylvain Moreno *et al.* (1999) from the Centre for Brain Fitness, Rotman Research Institute revealed that 90% of the children who participated in their study showed a remarkable gain in intelligence after only 20 days of musical training. More than two hundred neuroscientists around the world have declared that the effect of music draws on every region of the brain, and thus, makes music the ideal experimental tool with which to explore brain function.

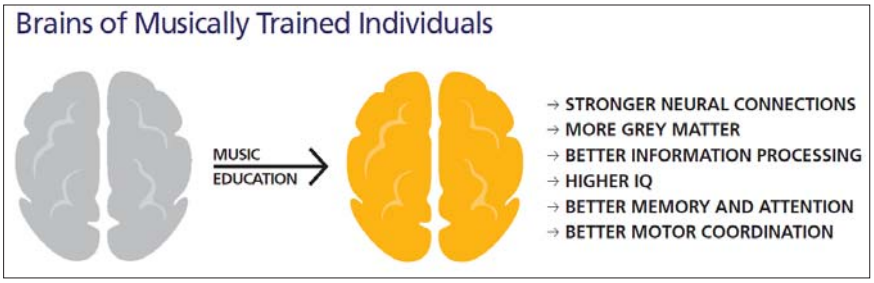

Figure 1: Taken from An Overview of Current Neuroscience Research: The Benefits of Music Education,

by The Royal Conservatory of Music, Canada.

Thus, scientific research has proven that "music education is a powerful tool for attaining children's full intellectual, social, and creative potential. It speeds the development of speech and reading skills. It trains children to

focus their attention for sustained periods. It helps children gain a sense of empathy for others" (p.1).

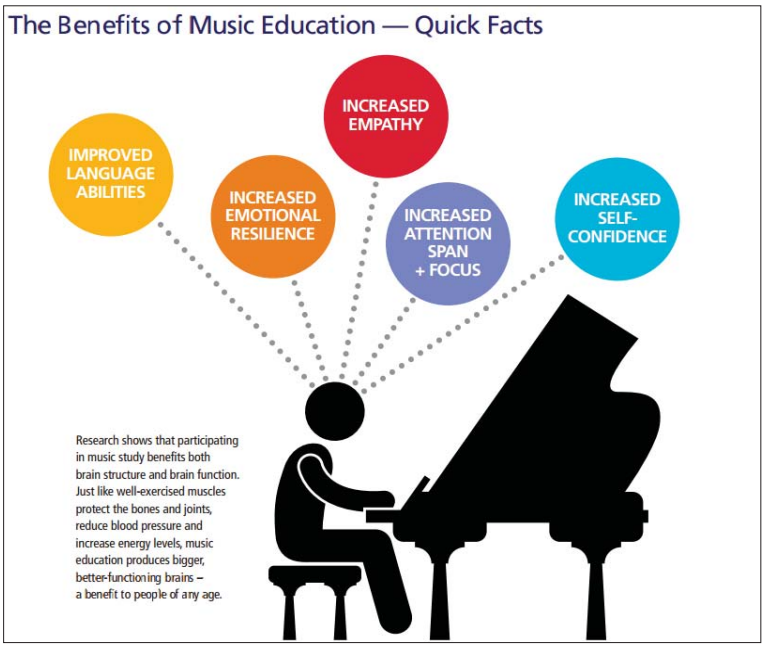

Figure 2: Taken from An Overview of Current Neuroscience Research: The Benefits of Music Education,
by The Royal Conservatory of Music, Canada.
E. Glenn Schellenberg, Music Lessons Enhance IQ
(Psychological Science, 15)

Graded Examinations by Foreign Boards

When considering the effects of formal assessment in graded music examinations, it is clear that it serves as a means of measuring students' aptitudes and, at the same time, motivates them to achieve intrinsic personal learning goals. The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity and London College music syllabi are tailored so as to motivate students acquire a range of skills, knowledge and understanding of musical language in general. Salaman (1994) claims that practical examinations are measured by assessing students on specific aspects based on the British National Curriculum, which was formulated for England and Wales' examinations in the 1980s (Mills, 1987). These examinations are largely categorised in two aspects: performing and composing, and listening and appraising. This kind of assessment does not gauge more than the required criteria, meaning that examiners do not evaluate students on the extended repertoire that are studied during the students' study period. The examiners focus primarily on the three set pieces and technical exercises (which are

normally practised months before the examination) ear training and sight reading.

The measurement of musical achievements during instrumental and vocal examinations provides a holistic overview of students' achievements. Due to the limitations of musical content inherent in practical examinations, Salaman (1994) argues that various aspects of musicianship could be incorporated within such examinations, and thus, plays a broader role when musical achievements are measured. On the other hand, Sloboda (1994, as cited in Davidson and Scutt, 1999) claims that examinations should be used for internal motivational purposes. The relationship in a teacher-student context, based on one-to-one lessons held during preparation for a practical instrument examination offers "a source of motivation" (Davidson and Scutt, 1999, p.80). In evaluating the concept of ways of working towards a graded examination, Sloboda (1994, as cited in Davidson and Scutt, 1999) argues that when students utilise examinations for intrinsic motivational purposes, these, in turn, serve to create an incentive to stimulate their learning outcomes. However, when students fail an examination, this in turn involves disappointment for the student, their parents and the teacher. Sloboda continues to argue that the teachers' role is crucial, as not only does it maintain their reputation, but it also protects their student's potential musical skills, and sustains support from their students' parents. In addition, the student's successes mostly depend on the teacher's continuous dedication and support, and their approach is highly influential on the student's perception of examinations. In this respect, drawing from my own personal experience as a music educator, the teachers play an important part in the development of the student's musical aptitudes and motivation and in nurturing a good rapport with the parents.

Apart from the graded examinations that form part of the formal assessment in measuring musical achievements, McPherson (2005) proposes other methods of assessment which enable children to "think in sound" (p.10). These are set in five tasks that assimilate the children's aural perceptions:

- ***Perform rehearsed music****: Using notation to provide a faithful reproduction of a pre-existing piece of music that has been practised over multiple rehearsals.*
- ***Sight-read****: Accurately reproducing music from notation that has not previously been seen or heard.*
- ***Play from memory****: Providing a faithful reproduction of a pre-existing piece of music that was learned from notation but performed without notation.*
- ***Play by ear****: Reproducing a pre-existing piece of music that was learned aurally without the aid of notation.*
- ***Improvise****: Creating music aurally without the aid of notation.*

Music Education in State Secondary Schools

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)[i] clarifies the required approach to teaching music and how students are expected to learn. The main focus of the music curriculum (which is aimed primarily at Form 1 and 2 students) is generally structured into three categories. The first is "Theory and Performance" which focuses mainly on a variety of sounds that students utilise and develop – an attainment that is acquired through voice techniques and using instruments which demonstrate "accuracy, fluency, expression and confidence" (Maltese Curriculum, 2012, p.9). The second is "Composition" which utilises their musical aptitudes by encouraging them to create musical arrangements and improvise using current technology and traditional sources. The third is "Listening" (with the sense of observing) discussing and evaluating the various kinds of musical genres and drawing on their personal opinions.

Interestingly, creativity was mentioned in the National Minimum Curriculum, which was published in 1999 (Portelli, 2012, p.11). However, there was no explanation of how this creativity was to be developed and enhanced. In September 2009, when the NMC was introduced, music was presented in Form 1 as an optional subject in a pilot project in one college in Gozo. Unfortunately, the original pilot project was never published, and thus, was never evaluated by all the music teachers.

Meanwhile, two years later, music became an optional subject in all state schools, including Malta. With the newly implemented reforms in the National Curriculum Framework (2011), the updated music syllabus changed to the extent that music is also an optional subject in Form 3. Therefore, students who opt for music as an optional subject in Form 3 have to attain a SEC level within a span of three years[ii], in both theory and practice. According to the music prospectus, students can take up music without any knowledge of the subject; however, it is recommended that an equivalent of Grade 2 level in both music theory and practice will facilitate the progress at this stage.

The music syllabus at secondary level is divided into two separate sections. The first part focuses on students who are in the first two years of secondary school (known as the, Middle School), whilst the latter is aimed at students who intend to pursue music as their main option in subject from Form 3 to 5. So far, since the introduction of the new (SEC) syllabus in 2012, the standard attained is simply inadequate, compared with other subjects. The reason for this is that the music syllabus does not meet required international standards, simply because the practical syllabus merely comprises two sets of practical pieces, and a very straightforward, uncomplicated sight-reading test piece. Various secondary music teachers have forwarded their complaints to the

highest authority in the Education Department, expressing their disappointment as to how and why the music syllabus was structured in this manner.

Moreover, the demands of the new syllabus exposed the lack of skilled teachers to cater for students who intend to specialise in certain specific instruments, such as, oboe, clarinet, saxophone, violin, etc. This gap in specialised teachers triggered a call by the Centre Administrator at the Johann Strauss School of Music, which forms part of the Visual and Performing Arts Schools under the Directorate for Lifelong Learning, and of the acting Education Officer for Music to allow students to opt to pursue their practical studies at the Johann Strauss School of Music while continuing with their theory lessons at their respective schools.

Music educators strive to convince the outside world that a musical education engages and motivates children and adolescents to pursue constant personal, professional and artistic development, regarding artistry, personal satisfaction, and development in education. Students are highly motivated when the content and style of handling a task is subject to their own personal judgement about their ability, outcome and individual satisfaction (Ames, 1992). Research has demonstrated that in various countries "motivation to learn music in the school curriculum" (Sanz and Orbea, 2014, p.375) is not prominent throughout elementary and secondary education, and the younger generation do not value music education as much as other subjects (Sanz & Orbea, 2014; MacPherson & O'Neill, 2010; Austin and Vispoel, 1998).

Drawing on my own personal experience as a music educator, music examinations in Malta are mainly linked to the British system, particularly recognised institutions, such as, ABRSM, Trinity and London College syllabi. However, the standards required by the Maltese SEC level (formulated and structured by the University of Malta), both the practical and theory syllabus, fail to match the standards required by British institutions. The secondary music syllabus requires a fair amount of upgrading if it needs to reach level 3. The present syllabus does not offer enough challenge to the student who can actually sit for an Ordinary level set by UK universities (e.g. Oxford London).

In the context of my critique, I am proposing a structure of what should be covered, on a yearly basis, from the first year of commencing music as an optional subject at Form 3 up to the SEC music examination. The proposed structure builds on the music appreciation syllabus of Form 1 and 2 and should include the four main components which are essential for forming basic musicianship – **Performance**, **Theory**, **Appraisal** and **Composition** Thus, the syllabus should contain the following components to be structured around a three-year course planner.

As the Maltese music syllabus is mainly structured on the British system, the following proposed syllabus is planned around the Edexcel GCSE[iii] and the Cambridge IGCSE[iv]. The British 'O' level system is suitable for Maltese standards due to its sustainability, structure and format. Moreover, it contains a well-programmed syllabus that promotes the maximum potential of the students.

The focal point of both these examination boards is primarily assessing the students on the four main components (as shown in Fig.3). This syllabus encourages the students to "listen to, perform and compose music, encouraging aesthetic and emotional development, self-discipline and, importantly, creativity. As a result, learners enhance their appreciation and enjoyment of music, an achievement that forms an ideal foundation for future study and enhances life-long musical enjoyment." (Cambridge IGCSE, 2016). In addition, the music syllabus emphasises the development of life-long learning musical aptitudes as well as acquiring knowledge. The Cambridge IGCSE music syllabus provides opportunities to:

- *listen to and learn about music from a wide range of historical periods and major world cultures*
- *develop their skills in performing music, both individually and in a group with other musicians*
- *develop their skills in composing music in a style of their own choice.*

Practical
1. *Technical Exercises* – exercises for finger dexterity 2. *Basic Keyboard playing* – which comprises of two contrasting pieces 3. *Ensemble performing* – which comprises of one or two simple pieces where students are engaged to perform together 4. *Sight Reading* - sight reading (on an instrument) an unprepared piece of music 5. *Aural Test* - aural perception
Theory
1. *Music, Knowledge, and Understanding*– should cover the whole spectrum of the rudiments of theory 2. *Aural Dictation* – music dictation based on the rudiments of theory 3. *Solfeggio* – sight singing an unprepared piece of music
Appraisal
1. *Analysis and History* – music appreciation covering various musical genres, including art music and popular music 2. *Listening* – to be able to analyse and evaluate a piece of music through listening to an excerpt (orchestral, piano, chamber etc.)
Composition
1. Creating short composition through the use of computer software and technologies

Figure 3: Formal Assessment for Music at SEC level (Option) – Forms 3 - 5

Fig. 3 shows how the proposed syllabus is structured around (a) basic practical musicianship; (b) theory, solfeggio, and aural training; (c) developing a holistic awareness of the different styles of Western music (including non-Western traditions) through the main historical periods; (d) creativity through composing. In the practical section, technical exercises are an important element of the student's developing musicianship. They involve scales and arpeggios and other related exercises featuring the basic and advanced elements for all instrumentalists and singers, as these:

> *"[…] build strong technical skills and musical understanding. By practising them students become familiar with their instrument and develop many aspects of technique, including articulation, tone, and intonation. Playing scales and arpeggios also helps students to understand keys. This gives them confidence and security when sight-reading, learning new pieces and performing – from a score or from memory, as a solo musician or with others"* (ABRSM).

Apart from the two contrasting set pieces that present different performance skills and interpretation in diverse musical styles, the practical examination also seeks to include sight-reading and aural tests. The element of sight-reading in a musical context is a valuable skill which results in various benefits. It enables the student to learn and perform new music more quickly and with confidence. Also, it helps the students to integrate with other musicians in a group environment, where the end result "becomes more rewarding and enjoyable" (ABRSM).

The aural test has a different role to sight-reading. The students are here assessed for their listening skills and musical perception. The test covers a wide range of aural features, such as: "awareness of pitch, pulse, rhythm, melody, harmony and other musical features" (ABRSM). Hence, developing this kind of skill is considered to be an essential element in any music education, and "[…] the ability to hear how music works helps students with all aspects of their music making and learning" (ABRSM).

The practical component of the syllabus has a written section which focuses on notation.

Music knowledge and understanding assists students to process and comprehend how a piece of music works, how it sounds, to evaluate and learn the composer's thought of line, and comprehend how the composer expresses the way his music is to be played. When learning music theory, students will become well-rounded musicians, and furthermore, advance their musical education.

Within the theoretical context of the syllabus students will further acquire knowledge and understanding of music history. The history section of the

syllabus should be structured in a precise systematic way. Students will be able to recognise, listen and comprehend the four major historical periods: Baroque music in the first year, Classical and the first part of the Romantic period in the second year, and the second part of Romantic and twentieth and twenty-first century music in the final year. Through the use of online resources and technology, students will gain a brief overview of each historical period.

At the post-secondary level, students will consolidate their learning further. The theoretical and historical context of the syllabus will focus on the analysis and criticism of musical literature and compositions, instructions in music history research methods, the history of musical writing and notation, knowledge and critical evaluations of advanced chromatic harmony, and the study of specific periods, cultural traditions, styles, and themes. Thus, to become an accomplished musician, the most important elements in music are to fully comprehend music theory and music history. Gonzol, director of music education and graduate programme coordinator for the MMME at Shepherd University, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, states that:

> *"All the best professional and amateur musicians, from Ella Fitzgerald to Paul McCartney, Adolph Herseth to Johann Sebastian Bach and Clara Schumann to Jean Ritchie, all made sure to know their field thoroughly and well. They knew their own performing skills, other performers, the repertoire, the history, the theory, the business, the culture, the people, everything. One can sing a melody or play a harmony, only if one really understands how those melodies or harmonies have been valued in their particular culture. How they have been performed, thought about, composed, improvised, listened to, danced to and worshipped to. Truly successful musicians understand all their music because they worked hard at becoming terrifically well-rounded. As cellist Lynn Harrell once said to a sixth-grade boy, 'There are no shortcuts'"* (OUP, 2014).

In addition, a formative assessment which is subject to a portfolio of on-going assessments should be cumulative, so as to monitor the student's progress. The overall formative assessment should include 6-8 criteria which present a more focused assessment that will enable the student to monitor his/her own progress. These criteria will continue to develop and enhance throughout the three-year programme, and thus, enables the student to fully comprehend the standards required by each criteria, as previously illustrated in **Fig. 3**. The portfolio of formative assessments should contain the following marking criteria, which are based on weekly coursework and, aural, and practical assessments. With regards to summative assessments, these are assessed during mid-yearly and mock tests, including the monthly aural assessments. Apart from applying diagnostic assessments for students with learning problems, formative assessments are an essential tool for "[…] monitoring of students to make sure that learning is taking place (Goolsby, 1999, p.32).

Gordon Zammit[v] (2016), a secondary-school music teacher and senior visiting lecturer at the University of Malta, contends that the music option at secondary level should focus on giving students a holistic overview of the subject. Subsequently, Zammit also stated that students who aspire to further their musical studies should develop their skills at the Johann School of Music, VPA and MCAST, and thereafter, continue on a professional basis at the University of Malta. Zammit proposed that the revised SEC syllabus should contain the following four main teaching blocks:

- **Theory of Music** (more commonly known with British institutions as Music Knowledge and Understanding), and Composition.
- **Music Appreciation** (which emphasis on History and Analysis, including art music and popular music)
- **Technology and Creativity** (knowledge on computer software and other related technologies which will enhance the student's ability and aptitudes in music creativity)
- **Basic Keyboard playing** (knowledge on keyboard performance which encompasses some basic technical exercises and understanding different stylistic musical genres)

When one evaluates the new updated music syllabi at the Johann Strauss School of Music in Malta and Gozo it is clear that it is based on much higher standards than those attained by the SEC, issued by the University of Malta. The Johann Strauss School performance and theory syllabi contain a salient continuum of areas and focuses primarily on music theory, history of music, solfeggio, aural training and performance practice (including instrumental and vocal ensembles). As the school's main focus is to develop the students' highest potential in both performance and theory, a series of continuous assessments are arranged throughout the year. Consequently, music teachers monitor their students' progress through the use of formative and summative assessments which enhance, evaluate and develop the students' creative skills and talents. In fact, the school's mission statement emphasises the importance of helping the students to achieve:

> *"The highest potential in playing proficiency, performance, creativity, and musicianship through a number of stimulating, effective and individualised music programmes and distinctive opportunities."*[vi]

Formal Assessment in Secondary Schools

Formal assessment methods are amongst the most significant classroom factors affecting student motivation. The quality of the classroom environment also contributes towards the effectiveness of the task and learning activities. In the primary and secondary phase of the educational system, "students tend to depend on their teachers" (Boekaerts and Niemivirta, 2000 as cited in Burwell, 2005: 200) to attain information, sustain

continuous motivation, provide learning material, and "take responsibility for the learning process" (p.200).

Assessment is best defined as the procedure of scrutinising student's behaviour and drawing on specific aspects that reflect their aptitudes. Philpott (2012) in his review of Martin Fautley's book "Assessment in Music Education" questions whether it is possible to assess cumulatively a composition or performance in their subjectivity. Is it possible to assess and measure arts in its entirety? Leham (1992) argues that the concept of assessment in music is rooted in defining and measuring the students' ability to perform a task which demonstrates their personal musical aptitudes, abilities and experience. Thus, the kind of assessment needed to measure students' musical aptitudes (either approached in a positive or negative manner) combines formal and informal assessments.

Formal assessment is presented as a well-organised and structured educational system, which consists of a range of learning objectives. From the learner's point of view, the learner's main objective is to acquire knowledge, skills and aptitudes (OECD, 2015). Therefore, the formal setting in the educational system is normally placed in a "sanctioned educational institutional", (Jenkins, 2011: p.181) where the main objective is to incentivise the student "to achieve certain planned goals set by curricula devised by the teacher or institution overseeing the teacher's efforts" (p.181). The learning process is primarily directed in the first cycle by the teacher, and later the instructions are given by qualified teachers (Mak, 2006). Birnie (2014), who codifies the principles of teaching students on an autoharp instrument, maintains that formal assessment may be a means to measure students' aptitudes individually or in small ensembles, in an allocated scheduled practice time-frame, allowing them to develop their performance aptitudes. In addition, the students' motivation in performing a selection of songs allows them "to have a decision-making role during the assessment process" (p.14).

Teaching Strategies in Differentiated Teaching

Music teaching is a long tradition as there have always been skilled musicians willing to pass on their expertise and knowledge to students. Sang-Hie Lee (1987) assistant professor of music and director of Studies in Piano Pedagogy at the University of Alabama observes that music pedagogy is an organised and structured way of building upon "the tradition of music teaching – to make it more scientific, efficient and effective" (p.37). As a disciplinary area of expertise, Lee further argues that music pedagogy necessitates a systematic curriculum that addresses teaching "as an art that is both technical and intuitive" (p.37). In itself, music pedagogy "is a systematic analysis of techniques for teaching performance skills" (p.37).

Differentiated teaching is simultaneously intriguing and complex as educators need to adopt a wide variety of pedagogical styles which focus both on the whole class and also individuals (Philpott, 2001. p.106). Philpott states that educators need to facilitate inclusion by:

> • *Creating effective learning by maintaining a secure environment in which all pupils feel valued, and by setting targets for learning which are attainable and which develop the self-esteem of the pupils.*
> • *Securing the motivation and concentration of pupils by building on interest and culture and accepting that pupils have a variety of learning styles.*
> • *Providing equality of opportunity, ensuring that boys and girls are given the same opportunities and yet allowing for a variety of interpretations and outcomes.*
> • *Adopting appropriate assessment procedures by using a variety of ways of coming to 'know' your pupils in response to a variety of learning styles.*

With reference to addressing individual learning needs, music educators need to acquaint themselves with how pupils learn, and recognise that there are different approaches and routes to musical success. During one of the JSSoM interviews, Mary Ann Cauchi (2016) explained: "if one focuses on the learning outcomes to be attained and the specific and diverse abilities of each student to attain the mentioned learning outcomes… than the differentiated teaching is automatically implemented."[vii] Music educators need to adopt an appropriate variety of teaching strategies to focus on these issues. Green (1998) suggests (in Philpott 2001, p.108) as:

- *Talking, discussing, questioning, being questioned by pupils*
- *Setting independent learning tasks*
- *Didactic input*
- *Practice/rehearsal*
- *Learning music by ear*
- *Learning music from notations*
- *Improvising*
- *Listening to and appraising music in a variety of ways*
- *Problem-solving, creativity and so on.*

According to the aims and objective, the Maltese Curriculum Guidelines (2013) and the National Curriculum Framework (2011), which consolidate the evolving needs and requirements of a differentiated teaching environment within a lifelong learning framework, music teaching is still regarded as a personal activity. In this day and age, the main "focus is placed on teacher quality and accountability" (Biedenbender, 2012: 1, as cited by Cowell, 2011). Biedenbender (2012) observes that "although not all students learn [in] the same way and teachers must be willing to adjust their teaching to meet the demands of students in their classroom. However, teachers often teach the way they prefer to learn instead of recognising the diverse learning styles of their students" (p.1). The author further emphasises that teachers should

reflect on their teaching methods and consider adapting and changing their strategies in order to involve more differentiated teaching in their practices.

According to Carol Ann Tomlinson, an American educator, author and speaker known for her work with techniques of differentiation in education, differentiated classrooms teachers "provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student's road map for learning is identical to anyone else's" (1999, p.2). Tomlinson provides a set of principles to guide instructors to meet the various needs of their students. The three main components of instruction which the teacher can modify through the use of the on-going assessments are based on *content, process* and *product.* In Darrow's (2015) article on differentiated instruction for students with disabilities Tomlinson (2001) states that "curriculum content should be aligned with learning goals and objectives, for all students, with its complexity varied based on students' abilities to comprehend the material. Content delivery is varied, based on groupings that are flexible and fluid, and beneficial to both students and teacher" (p.30). Tomlinson (1999) also points out that: "process describes activities designed to ensure that students use key skills to make sense out of essential ideas and information. Products are vehicles through which students demonstrate and extend what they have learned" (p.11).

When projecting and incorporating differentiated instructional strategies into lessons, teachers are able to assess and address their students' learning styles, interests, needs and readiness levels. On the other hand, when teachers provide multiple teaching strategies to address their students' learning needs, then the teacher is able to provide and "engage all students in differentiated instruction that is appealing, developmentally appropriate, and motivational" (Taylor, 2015, p.17).

The Role of Resources/Digital Resources in the Classroom

Digital technology in the twenty-first century encompasses a wide range of applications that include performance, composition and use of material from recording and publishing industries. Transformative "approaches to teaching in primary and secondary schools are part of a much larger social and cultural change driven by the arrival of these technologies" (Savage, 2007 in Wise *et al.* 2011, p.117). According to international research studies, the use of ICT in the music classroom is accepted as normal practice and part of specific curriculum requirements. It is also noted that "the teachers' approach in the classroom was becoming more student-centred as they became more comfortable with the possibilities of the technology and could assess their students' reaction to it and its impact on their learning" (Savage, 2005a, in Wise *et al.,* 2011, p.131-132).

In the guidelines for music teaching in the Maltese Curriculum (2013), the role of technology in music classrooms presents "the perfect tool for differentiating instruction" (p.9). For this reason, there are a number of classroom situations that lead themselves to the use of technology.

- *The use of music theory software to teach music fundamentals,*
- *Monitor student practice,*
- *Aural skills assessment,*
- *Utilize PowerPoint and Interactive Whiteboard to enhance the traditional lecture format,*
- *When giving assignments, allow for student creativity,*
- *Create cooperative group projects with clearly delineated roles to address different learning styles.*

In the research literature on the use of ICT and pedagogy, Way and Webb (2007) state that much of the material reviewed mostly focuses on practices involving both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches. The authors note that the use of ICT in teaching and learning contexts is sometimes linked to ground-breaking classroom practice. The research (Wise *et al.,* 2011, p. 120) illustrates the possibilities of ICT to transform pedagogical approaches serves in several ways:

- *A shift from instructivist to constructivist educational philosophies.*
- *A move from teacher-centred to student-centred learning activities.*
- *A shift from a focus on local resources to global resources.*
- *An increased complexity of tasks and use of multimodal information.*

The use of computers in the classroom does not only serve as a means to access faster information but "provides an opportunity to fundamentally change the way children learn. In particular, they allow teachers to employ a more constructivist learning environment" (Chapman and Mählck, 2004, p.31). Constructivism[viii] focuses on "student-centred learning, learning from experience, collaborative discussion, critical thinking, and reflection" (Chapman and Mählck, 2004, p.31). As a result, the varied use of technology in education has provided a strong argument where according to technology promoters "technology-based instruction can improve the consistency and quality of instruction, make learning more motivating for students, and extend access to hard-to-reach learners" (Chapman and Mählck, 2004, p.35).

Conclusion

This paper attempts to present the way forward for enhanced music education in Malta, primarily by focusing on developments to the music syllabus at a secondary level. The paper suggests amendments and new proposals in the syllabus, both in the practical and theoretical components

where it presents fundamental emphasis based on a holistic approach, in terms of sustaining and attaining basic musicianship at a professional level.

At present, the current music syllabus leads towards a foreign examination board, but this approach is not ideal as it does not sustain the ideal approach at a secondary level in Malta. The continuous constraints that are currently present both in the music syllabus and in the teaching sector are due to:

Human Resources

- the music subject is not always appreciated by the higher hierarchy of the schools, such as the Heads of Schools, as most consider it inferior to other subjects. Thus, the subject serves as a so-called 'damping zone'. Certain music teachers constantly strive to teach such students who consider them unsuitable for the subject.
- the music Education Officer should be responsible for promoting and informing all Heads of Schools that 'music' is not merely a second-rate subject. Music requires years of training, concentration and dedication.
- certain music teachers are teaching their students during break time, in order to compensate for the syllabus short comings. Breaks serve as a recreational period to both the teachers and the students, and not to continue on with the music syllabus.
- music teachers are employed by the DES to teach the subject and to continue maintaining a professional level, and not serve as an interlude of entertainment for the school's annual events.
- it is imperative and beneficial that there should be constant consultation and communication between the Education Officer, Heads of Departments and music teachers so as to develop a good and effective report within the department.
- the DES should be responsible for employing music teachers at secondary level who are knowledgeable and well-conversant in both the practical and theoretical aspects of the subject. The B.Ed music course was structured in a way where music teachers were being taught basic knowledge of the subject concerned, and thus, was tailored for student teachers who were aiming to teach at primary level and was not furnishing and delivering the necessary skills to be taught as an optional subject. The level of B.Ed students should rise to be *ad par* with B.A. (Hons) students in music.

Teaching Resources

- the present music syllabus is too comprehensive and demanding to be covered over a span of less than three years, which was originally tailored to be taught over a period of five years; which also was a struggle.

- there are not enough classroom resources and specialised equipment to continue to maintain the students' professional level.
- there are not enough teaching materials and resources to support both the teachers and students.
- there is not enough workforce of teachers to facilitate for certain specific instruments (it is impossible to cater for every instrument in a secondary school environment).
- students are required to be auditioned before opting for the subject in Form 2.

Examination Papers

- the theory examination papers necessitate being more adequately presented in terms of structure, terminology and proofreading.
- the teachers' examination resources are to be presented in an orderly manner, at the beginning of the scholastic year. This will facilitate any unnecessary inconveniences that might occur during the practical examinations at the end of the year.
- the practical examination pieces are to be compiled and sectioned according to their respective historical periods and instruments, in an appropriate booklet which serves as a guide to all music teachers. This is to be presented to all teachers at the beginning of the scholastic year.

Through the modifications to the syllabus proposed in this paper, students would be able to progress to a more professional level, where specialised schools, such as the Johann Strauss School of Music, Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) and MCAST could continue enhancing and developing the students' artistic talents and encourage them to continue their professional career at university level.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank Ms Mary Ann Cauchi (Centre Administrator at JSSoM), and Ms Mary Anne Zammit (acting Educational Officer), Mr Steve Mifsud (Head of School at St. Nicholas College, Boys' Secondary School Naxxar) and Dr Gordon Zammit (Secondary teacher and Senior Visiting Lecturer at the University of Malta) for their valuable comments and suggestions.

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NOTES

[i] The NCF was launched on 14 February 2013 by the then Minister of Education, Ms Dolores Cristina.

[ii] Precisely, two and a half years.

[ii] http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/music/gcse/music-8271 - [Retrieved 17 August 2016].

[iv] http://www.cie.org.uk/images/203268-2017-2019-syllabus.pdf - [Retrieved 17 August 2016].

[v] Interview with Dr Gordon Zammit held at Samra Secondary School on Friday 29 April 2016.

[vi] The mission statement is taken from the school's handbook.

[vii] Interview held at the JSSoM on Monday 25 April 2016.

[viii] Constructivism is used as a theory of learning which emphases the students' need to organise information and construct meaning for them.