2015 ASME Conference Report
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Firstly, I would like to thank the TRB for the opportunity to attend this conference. ASME (The Australian Society for Music Education) is a very professional organisation catering for all areas of music education from pre-school to tertiary level. The sessions I attended were informative, interesting and very useful to take back to my work places. I say work places because I have two roles within Music Education. Firstly I am a Music (although now more Performing Arts) teacher at Keithcot Farm Primary School. I teach R-7 students general classroom music as well as conducting three choirs and managing the instrumental program. My other role is within the Primary Schools Festival of Music Support Service (PSMF) where I am Production Manager and Acting Manager one day a week. The conference enabled me to wear both hats when choosing which sessions to attend.

The opening keynote address was by Professor Graham Welch from the Institute of Education, University of London. Professor Welch spoke about research he had done concerning the systematic mapping of musical behaviour and development. The first one was around the musical development of children with complex needs (such as severe learning disability or profound and multiple learning disabilities). This will have great implications for me in my role with the PSMF as we are a very inclusive program and have two or three special schools affiliated as well as having choristers from all ends of the ‘spectrum’ participating in choir. The framework for Professor Welch’s program starts early in a child’s development when first encountering sound to performing, improvising and integrating music into everyday life with a widening repertoire in a range of styles and genres.

Here is an example of what’s being done for these ‘special’ students. Michael is thirteen years old. He has absolute pitch, an extremely good musical memory. He is able to remember tunes he’s heard before in the right key, and can create his own tunes and improvise on them. He has taken the Associated Board Preparatory test. Music is a very important part of Michael’s life. In this clip Michael improvises on the piano with his music therapist, in the unusual key of Bb minor (referred to by Michael here as the enharmonic key of A# minor), which he has chosen. Michael plays both melodic fragments and chords, which his music therapist builds on. Michael offers a new key of B minor for the improvisation. He particularly loves the move of the semitone.
I attended a couple of sessions where Richard Gill (Arts advocate particularly around music education) was presenter/panellist and his main message was around the importance of music education for all. He reproduced data and stats around those students who had a solid music education (and opportunity). The results have been overwhelming and music educators all know and often repeat that these students are often adept in many other curriculum areas as well as being well rounded in ‘life’. Unfortunately it’s the people who control the purse strings who we need to be aiming this information towards. This is where the mentoring program comes in. The national program has started in NSW and WA where accomplished music educators are identified and work with general classroom teachers to give them the skills and experience (and courage) to teach the music part of the Arts Curriculum from the Australian Curriculum. It is hoped the program will start in South Australia very soon.

I attended two practical and one observational sessions around singing and choir where I learnt new warm ups and some different approaches to teaching songs. I will be able to use these directly in my lessons and choir rehearsals with students in all my choirs (R-7). The sessions were presented by Cinzia Cursaro from St John’s College (fun choral warm ups and rounds), Adrienne Cullity from Pulteney Grammar School who presented a Kodaly (European teaching methodology) approach to teaching a song; and Katie Carey from St Peter’s Boys who with her junior choir ran a ‘mock’ rehearsal. Katie also told us how she has incorporated music technology into her sessions with the use of iPads. Very useful with setting homework where the students email her recordings of their singing. If only all my choir students had an iPad!

Michelle Leonard from outback NSW presented a workshop on Unpacking Choral Creativity which was fabulous! She explored and demonstrated her approach to choral creativity as she worked with some local students whom she had never met. She talked about some of the problems we (as choir teachers) have with young choristers and how to overcome them. Michelle is a very dynamic and fascinating presenter. After listening to her session the PSMF has booked her to come and speak and present a workshop at our annual choir teacher’s conference for DECD choir teachers in February next year.

The keynote on the final day was by one of Australia’s leading IT/music educators, Katie Wardrobe. Katie runs many sessions for teachers/educators both in person and online. Katie’s keynote was titled “Level Up! Simple, Creative and Practical Technology”
Integration in Music Education”. Basically as educators we need to keep abreast of current trends and advances in technology without going overboard. There is still a place for traditional methods and practices but our students are moving ahead very quickly and it’s easy to fall behind. Katie showed us some simple (and not too hard on the budget) ideas/programs and gadgets we can use in our everyday teaching. She took us on a journey and helped to unlock our own level of tech integration by taking inspiration from teachers who are embracing the use of technology in music classrooms all over the world. She showed us what they are doing and how they are doing it. Simple things like finding public domain (free) pictures and sounds. Learning about live looping - there’s a live looping app which costs about $8 and a mixing and sampling app called ‘Pogo’. Students can create a digital portfolio of what they’ve done using their iPads. You can use Google and YouTube to find things. This is all part of us as teachers self-educating for life….trial and error! It may be time consuming to start with but time saving in the long run.

Thanks again for the opportunity to attend this conference. I will be (and have already) recommending the TRB PD opportunities to my colleagues in the future.

Anne O’Dea October 2015.