Thrilled to be sponsored to attend the ASME National Music Conference by TRB, I skipped along to Prince Alfred College for a beautiful three-day spring jaunt and exploration into music education. What a buzz! There was something magical about being in the presence of so many gloriously talented maestros from all over Australia, who are currently at the helm of guiding and inspiring the next generation of music makers. The experience of being in a lecture theatre with a hundred or so music teachers, as we sang in rounds at the command of Richard Gill, one of Australia’s most respected conductors, is something I’ll never forget! We sounded incredible! (not me personally), but we collectively brought the house down.

In that simple ten-minutes of choir training, I was reminded of the pure joy that comes with a good old fashioned sing-along, and the place of music throughout our daily lives. This year’s conference theme? *Music: Educating For Life.* Music education shouldn’t be seen as just something you do at school and then cast aside. Music affects our wellbeing and gives us pleasure, and music appreciation is for life. Encouraging children to explore their own musical capability throughout schooling will create adults with a confident sense of musicality, who live their lives immersed in musical experiences and who advocate for the importance of music in society. The sensory enjoyment children of all ages gain from listening, moving and creating music is undeniable, and its enhancement of their cognitive development shouldn’t be underestimated.

With my early childhood focus, I waded through the primary/secondary heavy program and was still able to find plenty of relevant workshops and concerts to attend over the three days that would benefit my professional development. Highlights from Wed included hearing keynote speaker Prof. Graham Welch present his research on a project called *Sounds of Intent* ([http://soundsofintent.org](http://soundsofintent.org)), which collects data in the UK from children with complex needs responding to music. His team map musical behaviours and it was fascinating to watch clips of autistic and high needs children show their diverse musical abilities.

My early childhood companion and I agreed, by far the most worthwhile workshop was the last session on Friday from James Madsen, called *Jam on Toast!* Sounds like early childhood right!? James was a bright, Peter Coombe type of guy who oozed enthusiasm and had us wrapped around his little finger joining in his songs and dances within five minutes. We twisted, bobbed, stomped, skipped, harmonised and played instruments with as much gusto as a room full of four year olds. We talked about the mind/music/body/movement connection and how critical this is with little ones,
in creating maximum enjoyment but also in drumming in learning concepts effectively through playful music involvement.

The digital focus of both James Humberstone and Katie Wardrobe was also useful, and I learned so much about the digital revolution in music production that’s happening in bedrooms of teenagers all over the world, and how to get classrooms up to speed! The creativity involved in making a track on the latest apps or the laptop, is as involved as composing in the traditional sense. As teachers, having the tools and the know-how is critical to engaging older students to connect with their passion for digital music. Katie Wardrobe introduced me to one app in particular that I know I will be able to use and I have a feeling the children will love it! Her lecture on Friday was excellent, and covered the new, simple, creative and practical ways technology can be integrated into music education.

Hearing next from Simon Smith’s experience teaching in the Cuban music schooling system had me ready to wiggle out of my seat and shake some marimbas, and made a strong case for the impact of immersion. The toddlers dancing in his clips are surrounded by music from the day they are born, and naturally a strong sense of rhythm develops. Being born into the cultural hotbed of Cuba, where music pulses through the streets and the veins of all its inhabitants, sets the whole community up to excel in music and dance.

On Thursday, listening to Richard Gill’s passionate and eloquent keynote address was certainly a highlight. He called on teachers to advocate strongly for music education in its own right, and not allow it to be bunched together within ‘the arts.’ Next was two very distinctly early years focused sessions, one related to the early childhood experiences of John Heyworth and how they shaped his education perspectives in music teaching, back in the days of Draconian piano teaches that would strike fingers on wrong notes. The other was from Bronya Dean on ‘The hidden world of song: Exploring the everyday singing lives of three and four year old children at home,’ this data analysis confirmed what I have observed in practice, that much like “self-talk,” children sing often and for all sorts of reasons. Bronya concluded in saying that singing is an important tool for young children’s communication and personal wellbeing.

A lecture and lunchtime concert from Guilford Grammar School and the Boodjar Bidi Dancers, (both from WA) followed, and hearing how a classical ensemble created a piece in conjunction with the Noongar culture was admirable. One of the leaders spoke of not just wanting to “Didge-ify” the piece. That, in order for the music to be meaningful, it had to be a coming together of sounds and cultures. In the afternoon, as there was nothing related to the early years, I went along to Kate Hargreaves “Creating Music Their Way” on the craft of DJ'ing and turntablism, for my own enjoyment!
How will I utilise my newly gained knowledge from this years ASME conference in my practice? Takeaways~ Let’s do this in point form:

1) Thanks to Katie Wardrobe’s introduction, I downloaded the App **Loopy** which I intend to use in kindergarten in small groups, playing with layering different sounds and having fun with what our voices can do. I created a few tracks on the app and love it! It combines creation with performance too, which adds another exciting element.

2) After seeing many lecturers use video recordings in presenting their evidence, I will certainly be upping my video output. Videos can be used as a tool for picking up on rhythm and musical ability and pattern making. Children also love seeing themselves in action on the IWB, and it provides an opportunity to reflect on their own learning, it makes sense to also project their music making for other children to be the audience.

3) On the subject of pattern making, I want to introduce some fun colour-coded music exercises and simple songs for children to “read” exposing them to the idea that, like words, music can be read. Having it presented as a fun play-based activity will be important for engagement.

4) I will be increasing spontaneous play with instruments and more singing into my practice. I have a musical background and am not particularly shy in this area, so why haven’t I been utilising my own skills more regularly!? Unfortunately other elements of teaching can take over, but next term I will be having a music heavy focus. I will encourage high level music making and thinking/talking about music, challenging children in clapping rhythms and body clapping (learned in Cuban workshop).

5) I intend on sharing quotes, Youtube clips and written excerpts from various lectures to my colleagues, children and families at the sites I work in. I can do this through adding to newsletters, visual displays, bringing points up in staff meetings, and chatting to families about what I have learned about their child’s learning when engaged in music.

I thoroughly enjoyed the ASME conference and would highly recommend general primary class teachers to attend next year as I think they would gain the most. Thank you to the TRB for allowing me to attend. I’m very grateful! Juliet Rooney