Lessons in Education and Music from Finland

Which country regularly comes top of the international assessments of attainment for 15 year olds in Reading, Mathematics and Science?

Which country had 'far more arts education than any other' in an international study covering more than 60 countries?

The answer to both these questions is Finland, and that raises an intriguing third question. Is there a connection between general educational attainment and arts education in Finland? As a musician working in education, it was natural for me to investigate this through music education. With John Witchell, Chief Executive of the Federation of Music Services, I spent two days in Finland, visiting schools and talking to key music educators.

Finland's Music Schools

First was a visit to Timo Klemettinen, the Managing Director of the Association of Finnish Music Schools. A music school in Finland is similar to a music service in the UK, but with one difference. It is separate from the schools system. Pupils go to the music schools for tuition after their ordinary schooling. In the UK the music service offers most of the tuition during school time with some tuition as well as ensembles out of school.

In Finland there are 88 music schools (and 23 schools in the other arts). Funding for the music schools comes from a combination of central government (52%), municipalities (30%) and fees charged to parents (18%). The total central government grant is €55 million annually, for a population of 5.3 million. In England the music standards fund grant is £82 million for a population of 51 million. This makes the Finnish grant more than five times the size of the English grant per head of population. The amount contributed by Finnish municipalities is more than eight times the amount contributed by English local authorities. The overall spending on education in Finland is very similar to the UK.

Despite this funding the music schools cannot cope with the demand. Community groups, churches and private foundations also provide heavily subsidised tuition.

The Association of Finnish Music Schools has recently been forging links with other arts schools to create the Arts Schools Union. They are working on a process of self-evaluation for all arts schools. In England we are now in our second year of peer moderated self evaluation of music services.

We then met Leif Nystén, Director of Music School Sandels and Chair of the Association of Finnish Music Schools and were shown round the music school. It was located mostly on the top floor of a school building, but included some shared accommodation with the school including a very nice auditorium with raked seating in the basement. This had been cut out of the rock and the bare stone was visible along one side. This made for good acoustics, as we heard from the school choir which were rehearsing. The music school pupils were mostly yet to arrive, but we did hear a pop band rehearsing with their tutor. They were listening to a recording they made of their own composition, which had been fully notated. It was an interesting piece, very tight rhythmically including some tricky cross rhythms. They then rehearsed Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody – an impressive piece to tackle and impressively played.

We are currently in the process of upgrading secondary school buildings through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. Secondary schools with specialist accommodation like that in Sandels would be a real community asset.

Integrating Music in the Classroom

The next morning we visited Kaisaniemi Primary School. The primary school in Finland goes from age 7 to 16. At Kaisaniemi the music teacher Anna Hurme showed us the specialist music classes at the school. Every year group has one specialist music class where all the children are musicians. Anna is both a specialist music teacher and a general class teacher. Anna teaches class 4, which is the equivalent of our year 6, aged 10/11. Tuesday was the day the children bring their instruments to school to be used in class. They were rehearsing a Finnish folk song arrangement in four parts, including some tricky chromaticism, which would be sung with a string accompaniment. While Anna was going through the parts with the violins and cellos the others got on with their maths exercises! Later in the term this piece was to be performed with pupils from the parallel specialist dance class who were working on a choreography for the piece. The school receives no additional funding for its music and dance specialist classes. Specialist equipment is purchased through fund raising, and the pupils music tuition is through their local music schools.

In England we have developed a model of whole class instrumental teaching called Wider Opportunities, and the recent impact assessment 'Wow its Music Next' has confirmed impressive outcomes for this free year of tuition. Our challenge is how to take this forward. In Croydon last year 91% of pupils wished to continue learning after the first year, but only 13% continued in small group or individual tuition. The Impact Assessment, and also last year's Ofsted report 'Making more of Music', has identified that many children enjoy learning in a large group and would benefit from continuing tuition in that way. Others are ready for small group and individual tuition and should be able to develop their instrumental skills.

The class at Kaisaniemi is a model we could use for classroom music following on from Wider Opportunities. It builds on the skills and enthusiasm gained in the Wider Opportunities year and uses the instrumental skills of those who are having additional specialist instrumental lessons. Having, for example, a number of guitars and keyboards in the room allows children to continue to develop instrumental skills and would allow them to take up more formal tuition again at a later stage. This model does require a specialist class music teacher. In Croydon we are working with a number of schools to develop such a model, and what I saw at Kaisaniemi makes me believe this is the right route to take.

Schools like Kaisaniemi show the result of the investment in the Finnish music schools. The string players in the class were all comfortable with shifting and vibrato. That would make them at around grade 5 at least. Helsinki has a population of approximately 560,000. This is about one and two thirds the size of Croydon. Helsinki has seven schools with a specialist music class – that is over 200 children in each year group. The equivalent in Croydon would be 120 children in each year group who are playing at or above grade 5 by the end of year 6. Wider Opportunities is just the beginning, we have some way to go before we can think that we are allowing our children to develop their full musical potential.

A Specialist Music School – but not as we know it

In the afternoon we visited Eastern Helsinki Music School – Primary School and were shown round by Vice Principal Pirkko Simojoki (a viola player like me!). This school is unique in Finland as an integrated music school and primary school, where the pupils have

their music lessons during the school day. In addition to their individual lessons pupils receive lessons in small groups as well as larger ensembles. We were able to see a flute group, cello group, accordion group and kantele group. The kantele is a beautiful, traditional Finnish instrument. It consists of strings stretched over a sound board which is held flat, often on a table, and the strings are plucked. There are switches for changing the pitch, similar to the way pedals work on a harp. The Principal of the Eastern Helsinki Music School – Primary School is Geza Szilvay, well known for the successful colour strings method based on the Kodaly principles of music education.

The musical standards reached in the school are very high. Their string orchestra, Helsinki Strings, tours regularly and has played at the Barbican and St John's Smith Square. The intensive musical training is not a barrier to their academic achievement. A longitudinal study over several years is showing that the students are on average two years ahead of their peers in their cognitive ability and concentration.

On the surface this looks like one of the specialist music schools in the UK which offer specialist music alongside academic lessons. But there is one significant difference. Specialist schools in the UK select their pupils by audition – requiring them to already show significant musical skills on their instrument. At Eastern Helsinki Music School pupils are selected before they have begun learning to play an instrument. Musical response and physical suitability are part of the criteria, but the main part of the assessment process is motivation. Last year the school had 51 applicants, and they would have taken 49 of them if there had been space. The siting of this school in Eastern Helsinki, the less affluent part of the city, its mission for cultural development through youth orchestras and its selection of pupils on the basis of motivation, makes it more like the El Sistema approach in Venezuela than a specialist music school in the UK.

Finnish Culture

The separation of music schools from the general school system would seem to be a potential barrier to an integrated approach to music and education in Finland. However, all our conversations indicated that it most certainly was not. All the specialist music educators we spoke to had a keen interest in, and knowledge of, the wider role of education in Finland and saw themselves as part of the overall picture. For example, music schools offer classes for babies from 3 months onwards. Yes these classes do aim to develop musicality and enjoyment of music from a young age, but they also aim to support parenting skills and the development of fine motor skills, two important areas for ensuring general education success at a later stage.

The key to understanding all of this is the history of Finnish Music Schools. They became a strong element in Finland in the 1960s, a time when the Cold War was at its height and Finland's relations with the Soviet Union were difficult. The Soviet Union was an important trading partner but less than 50 years previously Russia was the colonial power in Finland. It was important for Finland to express its own identity, not just within Finland but also to the outside world. With the example of Sibelius, music was a natural way for Finland to express itself, and to ensure future generations could speak for Finland, the Finnish Music School system grew.

That sense of Finnish culture pervades all of Finnish education. The national curriculum for Finland puts Finnish culture at its heart. From history to home economics, Finnish students study Finland's culture, other cultures which have influenced Finland, and other cultures from around the world. Yet this is not a society which is hostile to outsiders or minorities. Swedish is a national language although only 5% of the population have Swedish as their mother tongue. Rights are enshrined in law for Sami speakers (Lapps)

and Romani speakers, although these languages are spoken by a tiny minority of the population.

By contrast the words ‘English’ and ‘British’ do not appear in the ‘Understanding the Arts’ programme of learning in the new primary curriculum or in the ‘Music’ programme of learning in the secondary curriculum. Both talk about the place music and the arts has in different cultures, but apart from a phrase in ‘Understanding the Arts’ that children should be taught ‘about the diverse roles of the arts within the culture of their locality’, this is not placed in the context of their own cultural identity.

There is another curious difference between the music national curriculum in Finland and that in England. The words ‘classical’ and ‘popular’ do not appear in the Finnish curriculum. We heard an arrangement of a Finnish folk song taught as you would expect in a classical style. We heard a piece written by a parent (who was Turkish) being performed by a group of players performing on the traditional Finnish Kantele.

In Britain those from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds often regard classical music as being for the educated middle and upper classes. A feature of Finnish society is its more homogenous nature, and Sibelius is seen simply as Finnish music. The equivalent composers in England, such as Vaughan Williams, Holst and Britten who often used English folk music as a source and inspiration for their work, are seen as classical music.

Classical music is an international language but has its local dialects. The success of the El Sistema approach to social development through classical music in Venezuela has gained a great deal of interest over recent years. It is the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela’s performances of their own Latin American music which amazes us.

Debates about multi-cultural Britain are often presented as polarised views, but as musicians and artists we know better. If you are a musician you have your own cultural identity expressed through your own music. This is, and always will be, influenced by your heritage and the heritage of those around you. To enjoy and value other cultures we first have to value our own culture. That is well understood in Finland and enshrined in the national curriculum. I had to delve deep into the documentation about community cohesion on the website of the Qualifications, Curriculum and Development Agency (QCDA) to find any overt reference to this in the national curriculum in England.

Perhaps it is time to use music to positively promote cultural identity in the UK. In Croydon we often talk about the richness of the diversity of our population, yet we worry about the negative effects of racism. Music is a language which can allow us to take pride in our own heritage and to enjoy the different heritages of those around us.

Conclusions for English Education

Reviews of primary education in England have highlighted the value of play in the early years. The arts are a central part of children’s play and of their interactions with each other and with their parents and other adults. As children grow the arts become an important vehicle for their creativity, enjoyment, identity and well-being.

- The arts develop skills in learning, concentration and team work
- The arts are an effective tool for learning across other subject disciplines
- Young people who are able to express themselves through the arts, can use the arts to solve personal and social issues

In Finland school starts at age seven. Learning through play before formal schooling provides the basis for academic achievement. Finland also shows us that academic achievement in reading, maths and science is not achieved by neglecting the arts. The arts are an important element of education in Finland, and specialist additional music and arts schools receive substantial funding. The emphasis on Finnish culture gives young people a sense of identity and confidence. Because music education supports this it receives significant investment.

I am not trying to claim that arts education alone will give us the same level of educational achievement as Finland. For example, in Finland they believe a key part of their success is that teachers are all trained to masters level. However, the first reason given by Finland for its success in education is the growth of national identity and Finnish culture (described in *The Finnish Education System and PISA*, published by the Ministry of Education in Finland in 2009).

A feature of Finland's success in the PISA results is the strength of performance of the lowest performing group of pupils compared to other countries. This is not achieved by making them concentrate on basic numeracy and literacy as the following table from the Finland Ministry of Education document shows:

GENERAL WESTERN MODEL	THE FINNISH SYSTEM
Standardisation Strict standards for schools, teachers and students to guarantee the quality of outcomes.	**Flexibility and diversity** School-based curriculum development, steering by information and support.
Emphasis on literacy and numeracy Basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics and science as prime targets of education reform.	**Emphasis on broad knowledge** Equal value to all aspects of individual growth and learning: personality, morality, creativity, knowledge and skills.
Consequential accountability Evaluation by inspection.	**Trust through professionalism** A culture of trust on teachers' and headmasters' professionalism in judging what is best for students and in reporting of progress.

Addressing the underperformance of particular groups is a priority in this country, referred to as 'narrowing the gap'. Let us follow Finland's example and use music and the arts to raise the self-esteem, self-confidence and aspirations of those groups.

There are also those who are particularly vulnerable in society. Croydon's Children and Young People's Plan identifies the importance of reducing risks to the child or young person and promoting resilience within the child, family and community to deal with risks when they arise. The plan identifies the factors which enable children and young people to overcome adversity. Every single one of these is an objective for quality arts education.

Factors which enable children and young people to overcome adversity	Equivalent outcome for quality arts education
• Strong social support networks	• Belonging to an arts group provides a strong social support network
• The presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute	• Arts activity provides a natural support for strengthening family bonds
• A committed mentor or other person from outside the family	• The arts leader will be a committed mentor
• Positive school experiences	• Enjoyment of the arts is a positive school experience

• A sense of mastery and a belief that one's own efforts can make a difference	• Mastery in the arts raises self confidence and self esteem
• A range of extra-curricular activities that promote the learning of competencies and emotional maturity	• Arts education should offer opportunities out of school as well as in school
• The capacity to re-frame adversities so that the beneficial as well as the damaging effects are recognised	• Through the arts we can explore challenges and adversities in life, understand them better and take strength from coping with them
• The ability, or opportunity, to "make a difference" by, for example helping others through volunteering, or under-taking part time work	• Young people who are more experienced in the arts can take leadership roles and support others
• Exposure to challenging situations, which provide opportunities to develop both problem-solving abilities and emotional coping skills	• Working together to create and perform in the arts develops problem-solving abilities; rising to the challenge of performing in public develops emotional coping skills

We have begun an exciting journey in arts education in England. In June 2009, the White Paper 'Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system' included the pupil guarantee "that through partnerships between schools and other external providers (such as libraries, museums, and performing arts organisations), every pupil should have access to high-quality cultural activities in and out of school, with an aspiration that, over time, this will reach five hours a week for all".

Within music education we are on course to meet the 'Wider Opportunities' pledge that every child will have a free year of learning to play a musical instrument. Impressive benefits of this have been documented in the impact assessment 'Wow its Music Next'.

Our challenge is to find sufficient resources to:

- Ensure the five hour pledge becomes a reality
- Develop quality in arts education to create greatest impact
- Enable those with interest and aptitude to develop their full potential in the arts

Our objectives will be:

- Young people learning vital personal, social and educational skills to enable them to achieve
- Young people confident of their identity and their role in society making a positive contribution to their communities
- Young artists making a contribution to the cultural life of their communities

In addition to improving the quality of life and the life chances of young people, investing in quality arts education will save money. Quality arts education will increase resilience in vulnerable young people, reduce youth crime and disorder and reduce the number of NEET young people (Not in Education, Employment and Training). If in addition those young people are able to make a positive contribution to their community, then instead of taking up valuable resources they become a resource themselves. It is a win-win situation: not only have their lives been improved but they are able to improve the lives of those around them.

Graeme Smith
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Appendix: The Impact of Quality Arts Education

The research which found the large amount of arts education in Finland is documented in 'The Wow Factor' by Professor Anne Bamford. Commissioned by UNESCO, the research compared data and case studies from more than 60 countries. It found that arts education has impact on the child, the teaching and learning environment and on the community. As well as educational benefits, quality arts education has distinct benefits for children in such areas as, among others, health and socio-cultural well-being.

- Complementary but different benefits accrue through ***education in the arts*** (teaching in art, music, dance and drama) and ***education through the arts*** (the use of the arts as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of other subjects such as numeracy, literacy and technology). The two approaches are interdependent. The greatest impact at all levels – child, learning environment and community – is achieved where excellent programmes exist in both education in the arts and education through the arts.
- Education in the arts can produce impact in terms of improved attitudes to school and learning, enhanced cultural identity and a sense of personal satisfaction and well-being.
- Education through the arts can enhance overall academic attainment, reduce school disaffection and promote cognitive transfer.
- Quality arts education leads to an improvement in student, parental and community perceptions of schools.
- Quality arts education increases co-operation, respect, responsibility, tolerance and appreciation, and has a positive impact on the development of social and cultural understanding. Arts-rich programmes appear to encourage more focussed classroom interaction, greater concentration during school and more consistent school attendance – especially in boys and marginalised ('at-risk') students.
- Poor quality or inadequate arts education has a negative effect, inhibiting the development of creativity and imagination.

The research identified the characteristics of arts education which had greatest impact:

- Partnership
  - active partnerships between schools and arts organisations and between teachers, artists and the community
  - organisational flexibility and open boundaries between schools and arts organisations and the community
  - shared responsibility for planning, implementation and assessment and evaluation
- Accessibility for all children
  - an entitlement to high standard arts provision for all, regardless of artistic skills and abilities, initial motivation, behaviour, economic status or other entering attribute
  - the opportunity to create in a broad range of the arts
- A combination of ***education in the arts*** (development within the specific art forms) and ***education through the arts*** (the use of the arts as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of other subjects such as numeracy, literacy and technology) including:
  - project based activities connected into meaningful sequences
  - provision for critical reflection, problem solving and risk taking
  - an emphasis on collaboration
  - use of local resources, environment and context
  - opportunities for public performance, exhibition and/or presentation
  - detailed strategies for assessing and reporting on children's learning, experiences and development
- Ongoing professional development for teachers, artists and the community