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The benefits of music workshop participation for pupils' wellbeing and social capital: the In2 music project evaluation

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the evaluation of the In2 music project in Darlington, England. The project ran for seven weeks from January – March 2020 and involved Year 6 pupils from four primary schools ($n = 103$) and Year 7 pupils from one secondary school ($n = 90$), working with Back Chat Brass, a professional brass ensemble. The aim of the In2 music project was to enable pupils to work with professional musicians to enjoy the benefits of group-based music, which include happiness and optimism. These emotions are strongly associated with social capital, which this study defines as the benefits that individuals and communities derive from positive interpersonal relationships. This evaluation asks if the In2 music project resulted in non-quantifiable changes that are associated with positive outcomes for pupil wellbeing and social capital. We explore our findings in relation to a policy climate of cuts to arts education, as shown by the stories in a special issue of Arts Education Policy Review. We argue that while political disregard threatens the development of social capital in economically deprived communities, funded interventions such as In2 can benefit some of the most vulnerable members of such communities.

KEYWORDS

Music education; social capital; socio-economic deprivation; pupil wellbeing; policy footprints

Introduction

In January 2020, Ryan Shaw introduced stories of arts education cuts in a special issue of Arts Education Policy Review (Shaw, 2020). These stories explore the impact of arts funding policy in school districts in Lansing, Michigan; Chula Vista, California; Sarasota, Florida; New York City; Baltimore and Boston. Also in January 2020, Durham University began its evaluation of the In2 music project, exploring the impact of arts investment in an economically deprived school district in Darlington, North East England. The evaluation of the In2 music project is the focus of this current paper. While the In2 music project took place in a different national policy context, it aligns with the scenarios outlined in the journal's Special Issue.[1] As noted by Shaw (2020):

> Each situation represents a somewhat familiar cadence. There is first a lack of investment in arts education (i.e., certified arts educators, courses, resources) by an urban school district, often for reasons determined by macro-level policy conditions such as school funding disparities, accountability pressure, arts teacher certification policies, and more. Then, a point of reckoning comes. Some catalyst—a school district leader, a politician, a philanthropic organization—convenes concerned parties to study the problem of arts education inequity. With slight variations to follow, the most common approach has been to create a coordinated public–private partnership. (Shaw, 2020, p. 7)

In this paper, we explore this cadence in Darlington, asking how it compares with the experiences identified in the journal's Special Issue. In so doing, our aim is to ask why "policy footprints", as defined by Shaw (2020, p. 2), so often retrace steps with no clearly set direction.

We begin by introducing the In2 music project, exploring its context and rationale, and the impact of the project on pupils' wellbeing and social capital. We then consider the policy implications of our study in conversation with the Special Issue.

The In2 music project

The In2 music project involved Year 6 pupils (ages 10–11) from four Darlington primary schools and Year 7 pupils (age 11–12) from one Darlington secondary school, working with Back Chat Brass, a professional brass ensemble (see https://backchatbrass.com/). The project ran for seven weeks from January – March 2020. Darlington Borough Council and UK Research and Innovation (Special Projects Fund) funded the In2 music project as part of a larger three-year study that seeks to uncover how the arts and sport help school transition for pupils with low socio-economic status. Research suggests that, for some pupils, school transition can be stressful, and that vulnerable pupils need effective support prior to transition (Bailey, 2010; Brown, 2012; Evangelou et al., 2008; McGee et al., 2004). Darlington Borough Council's Strategy and Performance Team identified the most deprived wards in Darlington, and helped select the schools to take part in the project. The selection criteria for pupils participating

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Table 1. Workshops and performances.

School	Year group	No. of pupils	No. of weeks	Intervention
Primary School A	6	20	7	6 x two hour workshops; 1 × 45 minute workshop; 45 minute performance for rest of school and parents
Primary School B	6	20	7	6 x two hour workshops; 1 × 45 minute workshop; 45 minute performance for rest of school and parents
Primary School C	6	40	7	6 x two hour workshops; 1 × 45 minute workshop; 45 minute performance for rest of school and parents
Primary School D	6	23	3	2 x two hour workshops; 1 × 45 minute workshop; 45 minute performance for rest of school and parents
Secondary School E	7	90	7	3 x one-off sessions with different classes

in the project identified pupils who did not reach formal thresholds for additional/formal support, but had social, economic, and behavioral or health and wellbeing challenges which might make them vulnerable during the transition from primary to secondary school.

Plastic instruments (pTrumpets, pTrombones, pCornets and pBuzz) were purchased with support from UKRI funding raised by Durham University and sponsorship from Warwick Music. The budget has allowed for the purchase of one instrument per child in the cohort, and these will remain in the schools as part of the legacy of the project.

Back Chat Brass ran the music workshops. The musicians encouraged free play of music and taught the pupils set pieces to perform in front of parents, teachers, and pupils in their school. The full band worked with the pupils for the first workshop, last performance and all of the secondary school sessions. The core band worked with the pupils for the remainder of the workshops (see Table 1).

All of the workshops and performances took place in the schools, with the exception of Primary School C, which had workshops with the band at Darlington Hippodrome, with the final performance in school.

In2 music project policy context

The In2 music project took place against a backdrop of increasing cross-party concern about the crisis facing music education in England in the wake of curriculum reforms. A recent report found that:

> Government policy, particularly around accountability measures like the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), has significantly negatively impacted on music education in schools in England. Curriculum time for music (which is statutory for Key Stage 1–3) has reduced, along with opportunities for children to pursue music to GCSE and A Level. (University of Sussex, 2019, p. 3)

The project also took place against a backdrop of school funding cuts, which have further contributed to the loss of music provision in schools (Fautley & Murphy, 2016). After years of Government cuts, 31 of 36 schools in Darlington are still in crisis, with a predicted financial shortfall of £4 m in 2020, equating to a per-pupil loss of £291 (Stop School Cuts, 2020). In response to the University of Sussex's (2019) report on the lack of music in schools, the Government put out a "call for evidence" to develop plans for a new model music curriculum for children age 5–14 (DfE, 2020, p. 1). It also pledged £1.33 million to fund 120 music hubs to co-ordinate music provision between schools, teachers and music organizations in their area (TES, 2020). Although welcome, this news does not alter the policy landscape for the teachers, pupils and musicians involved with the In2 music project.

School funding cuts are part of the UK Government's deficit reduction plan, unveiled in 2010 (see HM Treasury, 2010). The Government's policy of austerity has resulted in a sharp decline in spending on welfare, with negative consequences for families with low socio-economic status. In March 2020, Darlington Borough Council published its Local Insight profile for the Darlington Area (OCSI, 2020). According to this report, 25% of people have no qualifications in Darlington, compared with 22% across England; 20% of people in Darlington have a limiting long-term illness, compared with 18% across England, and 20% of children are living in poverty in Darlington, compared with 17% across England. Darlington Borough Council's Local Insight profile for the Darlington Area (OCSI, 2020) records % of children (aged 0-15) in poverty (as % all children aged 0–15). According to this data, Primary School C and Primary School D are located in areas with **15.9%–24.7%** of children (aged 0–15) in poverty, while Primary School A, Primary School B and Secondary School E are located in areas with **24.7%–92.9%** of children (aged 0–15) in poverty.

The impact of austerity on the people of Darlington has been explored by the Community Foundation (2017, p. 5), who report that severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD) occurs when "someone faces multiple, often related and mutually reinforcing, issues which create a high degree of exclusion from society and lead to high levels of stigma". Four issues commonly found together are "offending, substance misuse, homelessness and mental health problems" (ibid). Darlington is among the areas of Tees Valley with the highest rates of SMD (150–307 people with 2+ aspects of SMD) (ibid).

Some of the pupils taking part in the In2 music project are experiencing SMD, such as homelessness, reliance on food banks, and family breakdown. Tess Ridge (2013, p. 410) offers a child-centered perspective on austerity, arguing that Government policy has stigmatized disadvantaged children by inflaming "myths and stereotypes

associated with notions of the 'underclass' and the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor". Children, argues Ridge (2013, p. 411), "do not exist in a vacuum"; they are "seasoned media watchers and active and aware social participants". Disadvantaged children are thus at risk of internalizing the message that their parents are "scroungers", "skivers", "work shy" and "feckless" (ibid, pp. 410–411). In addition to experiencing social humiliation, disadvantaged children experience anxiety over their family finances, and are obliged to withdraw from social activities that require money. As noted by Ridge:

> Childhood is increasingly commodified and opportunities to take part in clubs, sports and other leisure activities are dictated by cost and other access factors such as the availability of transport to travel to out of town facilities, and the accessibility of after-school clubs and leisure centers. Clearly, cuts in social security benefits have a severe financial impact in disadvantaged families but one part of that impact for children will be that there is less money to go round and restricted family budgets will mean reductions in children's participation (Ridge, 2013, p. 409).

The In2 music project therefore offers a much-needed corrective to this social injustice by bringing professional musicians into schools to work with disadvantaged children who (i) do not have the means to take part in musical activities outside of school (Ridge, 2013), and (ii) are experiencing government-imposed limitations on within-school music provision (University of Sussex, 2019).

Weinberg and Joseph's (2017) theory on the social component of music engagement suggests that music workshops may be of particular benefit when seeking to address the emotional dimension of deprivation identified by Ridge (2013). According to Weinberg and Joseph (2017), the social component of music engagement is a key factor contributing to the positive outcomes for wellbeing associated with music. They argue that, while research has indicated that engaging with music alone may improve physical health and emotional wellbeing, "other research has shown that engaging with music in the company of others is associated with stronger positive experiences" (ibid, p. 3). These positive experiences include, but are not limited to, "happiness"; "general life satisfaction"; "mood regulation", and "a sense of mastery of the world" underpinned by "self-esteem, optimism and perceived control" (ibid, p. 2). Music workshops that increase pupils' positive experiences offer hope that we might counterbalance or eradicate disadvantaged children's internalization of the negative messages about poverty propagated by Government, which locate poverty as a personal failure (Ridge, 2013).

Social capital theory

In her review of music education research, Anita Prest (2016, p. 127) reports that an increasing number of researchers are using social capital theory as a framework to explore the "personal and collective benefits" of music education. Despite its obvious utility for the exploration of the relationship between music education and wellbeing, social capital theory risks importing ambiguity into music education research unless carefully defined, as the term "social capital" is employed quite differently by its most notable exponents, John Dewey and Pierre Bourdieu. Dewey (1909) argues that social capital is inclusive and benefits society, while Bourdieu (1986) argues that social capital is exclusive and tends to benefit the individual. In educational research, social capital is often defined as the network of relations that support pupils' attainment of credentials for employment (Gewirtz et al., 2005), and thus is closely aligned with the individualist discourse critiqued by Bourdieu (1986). This present study draws, instead, upon Dewey's (1909, p. 72) understanding of social capital, endorsing his belief that "it is the business of society as a whole today, to see to it that the environment is provided which will utilize all of the individual capital that is being born into it." We therefore define social capital as the benefits that the individual and community derive from positive interpersonal relationships that enable every individual to thrive.

Methodology

Our evaluation of the In2 music project was informed by Tam et al.'s (2012, p. 24) claim that "Individuals differ in the extent to which they internalize cultural ideas" and that people's subjective wellbeing and social capital are "dynamically constructed". Adopting a constructivist approach, we acknowledge that pupils' understanding of the world is built through social interactions that take place within multiple cultures (school; family; local community; social media, etc.) and result in variations in pupils' subjective wellbeing and social capital that are difficult to explain using quantitative measures of social wellbeing (Rees & Bradshaw, 2018).

In light of the above, our evaluation asked:

> Did the In2 music project result in non-quantifiable changes that are associated with positive outcomes for pupil wellbeing and social capital?

We conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers, musicians and parents. In order to gain some understanding of the social world of the In2 music project (Tam et al., 2012) we observed seven workshops, four rehearsals and four performances. The aim of qualitative observation is to draw the researcher "into the phenomenological complexity of the participants' worlds" (Cohen et al., 2018 p. 314) and witness, "how situations unfold" (ibid). We transcribed and coded the interview data and analyzed the observations using a qualitative method based on Miles and Huberman (1984), in which we summarized our notes, identified salient themes, and created vignettes.

Findings

When asked what challenges their schools and pupils faced, teachers mentioned their pupils' socio-economic status and low self-esteem. In the words of one teacher, "…our children have quite tough lives. They have a hard life" (Primary School A). This finding is consistent with the report by Darlington Borough Council (OCSI, 2020), which highlights issues around severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD) in the community. One teacher hoped that the project might offer children respite from SMD: "It's also like a little bit of escapism, so if things are tough, you can take yourself somewhere else and make yourself feel good and positive about everything" (Primary School A). As might be expected, when asked about their aims for the project, teachers talked about raising pupils' self-confidence and broadening their horizons: in the words of one teacher, the purpose of the project was "to develop the self-confidence and self-esteem of every child" (Primary School C).

We did not ask the musicians contextual questions about deprivation, but they nevertheless identified social justice as one of the project's aims. Like the teachers, the musicians hoped that the project would help pupils become more confident and give shy pupils that "extra little boost" (BCB B), saying this is particularly important in "low income areas" (BCB A). It is widely acknowledged that children with low socio-economic status are "at increased risk of reduced health and well-being compared to the general population" (Shannon et al., 2018, p. 2), making the teachers' and musicians' desire for the project to enhance pupils' wellbeing highly pertinent.

Consistent with reports on the demise of music education in English schools (see e.g., Bath et al., 2020; Fautley & Murphy, 2016; Savage & Barnard, 2019; University of Sussex, 2019), the musicians said that music education is being "taken away from the general curriculum" (BCB A) and quickly becoming something that is only available to people "with more money" (BCB A). An additional project aim for the musicians, therefore, was to address this gap in provision by giving "the kids an opportunity to play instruments that they probably wouldn't get" (BCB A). When considered in light of research into the relationship between music participation and wellbeing, the implications of this finding are considerable. According to Weinberg and Joseph (2017, p. 2), the social component of music engagement contributes strongly to positive experiences that are bound up with "self-esteem, optimism and perceived control". If, as the Back Chat Brass musicians imply, these positive experiences are readily available to wealthier pupils, but are increasingly unavailable to disadvantaged pupils, then the decline of music provision in schools risks further compounding health and wellbeing inequalities between pupils (Shannon et al., 2018).

For the musicians, the value of the project was consistent with its aim: to give disadvantaged pupils the opportunity to play an instrument. By bringing plastic instruments into the schools, Back Chat Brass were able to overcome the tendency of financially challenged schools to push "drums or something like that, that they have been doing for years", simply because they have "a cupboard of some really old instruments" (BCB B). The teachers echoed this sentiment: "We used to have a professional musician who came in and we had a rock band…and that stopped because we didn't have that funding anymore" (Primary School B); "the fact that we've been able to access these resources…it's brilliant, because every school's struggling for budget, aren't they?" (Primary School A).

In their report on the declining place of music education in schools in England, Bath et al. (2020, p. 10) identify a "skills and confidence gap in relation to primary music teaching". Bath et al (ibid) cite evidence that "For generalist primary teachers, their training in music on postgraduate courses is extremely limited, ranging between two and eight hours in total". Primary teachers' resultant inability to teach music proficiently is acknowledged by teachers in our study: "You don't know a lot of primary teachers who are musicians or even musical. Even teachers who lead music in the school don't all play an instrument" (Primary School C). Our findings indicate that the teachers and musicians believed the In2 music project was valuable because it helped overcome some of the issues around music education arising from: its marginalization in the curriculum; lack of sufficient teacher training, and chronic underfunding (for detailed analysis of these issues, see Bath et al., 2020).

In order to answer our research question, we were interested in data that revealed if the project had resulted in non-quantifiable changes associated with positive outcomes for pupil wellbeing and social capital. Although bound-up with the project's attempt to address the social justice implications of the marginalization and underfunding of music education, we were seeking evidence of the value of the project beyond the issue of equity of provision.

With regard to social capital, the responses of the teachers were insightful. One said, "I think [the pupils] felt successful, because a lot of them don't feel like they are successful in a lot of things in school, but [the project] was a chance for them to be successful. And they felt it" (Primary School C). The use of the word "successful" is interesting, as in educational settings, "success" is strongly associated with academic performance rather than the benefits to the self and society of positive interpersonal relationships. In 2015, the UK Government (DfE, 2015, p. 3) produced a report claiming, "Successful schools have a clear vision for what all their pupils will achieve through high quality teaching, with an ethos that reinforces aspiration and attainment for all". Presumably, then, schools with low pupil attainment are not considered to be "successful". In terms of social justice, the conflation of success with attainment is problematic, as

the UK Government (DfE, 2019) has itself acknowledged the link between deprivation and academic under-performance. In its report on Key Stage 4 performance (DfE, 2019, p. 8) the Government states, "Attainment was lower for disadvantaged pupils compared to all other pupils across all headline measures in 2019 consistent with previous years".

As noted by Henry Giroux (2015), the politics of austerity are creating both the conditions of hardship and providing a "rationale" to disparage those thereby dispossessed and rendered "unsuccessful". The teacher's use of the highly loaded word "success" to describe the pupils' experience of the In2 music project points toward what Gerald Roche (2019) describes as the "decolonization of language". According to Roche (2019), we decolonize language when we use it to demand recognition of marginalized groups within society, rather than reinforce their subjugation. By describing disadvantaged pupils as "successful" outside the standard discourse of academic attainment, the teacher draws attention to the value of the project as a means to foster social capital within a wider culture that works against this process.

To understand how the wider culture might block the development of disadvantaged pupils' social capital, it is helpful to consider Ruth Wright's (2012, p. 12) assertion that there is "a symbiotic relationship between inclusion and social capital – one cannot be without the other." This claim resonates with Diener et al.'s (2003) analysis of subjective wellbeing:

> Marginal individuals … might have a harder time in individualistic [Western] societies than in collectivist ones, whereas people with a large number of strengths and resources might enjoy the individualistic lifestyle more. (Diener et al., 2003, p. 412)

In order to have social capital, children need to feel "included", rather than on the margins of society, and this sense of inclusion is, in turn, part of social capital. For disadvantaged children, inclusion can be challenging. As noted by Ridge (2013), austerity measures have disproportionately affected poorer children in England, entrenching SMD and ensuring they are unable to access extracurricular activities such as music lessons. In addition, poorer children are less likely to feel included in mainstream education. Data published in 2019 reveal that, in England, "78% of permanent exclusions were to pupils who either had SEN, were classified as in need or were eligible for free school meals", while "11% of permanent exclusions were issued to pupils who had all three characteristics" (Timpson Review of School Exclusion, 2019, p. 10). In 2019, there was a sharp rise in the number of school exclusions in the North East of England, with 929 pupils excluded in Darlington (Conner-Hill, 2019). It seems, then, that schools are struggling to overcome barriers to poorer pupils' "sense of belonging" in education, which block the development of social capital.

Although the picture looks bleak, Wright (2012) argues that music education offers a ray of hope:

> Music might be one of the answers to building social capital; a way of reaching outside individual identities and co-constructing new shared ones: a new sensation of 'we'. (Wright, 2012, p. 12)

Music's ability to foster "a new sensation of 'we'" was evident in the teachers and musicians' discussion of the project: the pupils had "opened up" (Primary School A) and were "all coming together to do something together" (BCB B). The involvement of the pupils' parents helped strengthen this sense of "we" by bringing the school and families together. One teacher asked the interviewer, "Did you see the parents at the back? They were so excited about it and they were beaming… the parents feel proud and, in return, the children feel proud because they're making the parents smile. And it's just that big cycle, isn't it?" (Primary School A). The importance of the involvement of parents and the wider community was mentioned by another teacher, who said, "we've kept [the In2 music project] high profile and around like outside of school as well as in the classroom, just so that everybody's there, everybody's involved in what the children are doing" (Primary School C). According to Wright (2012, p. 13) people who make music together "mold their own minds and bodies into a shared emotional state" that is communicable to others. This process of integration helps develop social capital, even in the most challenging circumstances (Wright, 2012).

In their analysis of the social and cultural benefits of live music, Hoeven and Hitters (2019, p. 263) found that live music "offers a sense of belonging". Similarly, in their case study of the manifestation of social capital in a community choir, Langston and Barrett (2008, p. 119) claim that group-based singing fosters "fellowship". For Langston and Barrett (2008, p. 131), "fellowship evolves from and, in turn, facilitates trust, friendship, mutual support, working together and the development of relationships", and is therefore an important "social capital indicator"(ibid). Indeed, for some choir members, "fellowship is as important as music" (ibid). The interview and observation data from the In2 music project appear to confirm Langston and Barrett's (2008) claim that group-based music develops fellowship. The observer records examples of pupils showing one another how to play the correct note; applauding the efforts of soloists; encouraging their classmates to behave appropriately, and copying dance moves. One musician described how, over time, the pupils began to see themselves as a musical ensemble preparing to put on a show: "You can see them take ownership of it and the maybe slightly disinterested ones suddenly starting to nudge the one next to them that keeps trying to distract them and try to get them involved again" (BCB B). One parent described the support her son received from his classmates, saying he gained confidence about dancing on stage by making eye

contact with his fellow dancers. For some pupils, the fellowship fostered by the In2 music project began to permeate and enhance their everyday classroom behavior: "Within class, children that wouldn't share their ideas before…feel like that they're more, 'I'll give it a go'" (Primary School A); "They've been more responsive and more positive in their behavior" (Primary School C).

Music teachers Allsup and Shieh (2012, p. 48) encourage music educators to orient themselves to the "diverse and particular ways that students reveal who they are through the work we do together in this public space called school", arguing "the moral imperative to care" is "at the heart of teaching" (ibid). Orientation and the moral imperative to care are evident in the In2 music project. Rather than seeking information in advance about disruptive pupils, the musicians preferred to let the pupils reveal who they were through their engagement with music: "Sometimes you will get told the stuff [about pupils with behavioral issues]. When we first go to a group, I like to *not* know anything, because you start treating them different" (BCB A). The musicians capitalized on the pleasure of fellowship (Langston & Barrett, 2008) by praising disruptive or non-compliant children's integration with the group, however fleeting: "I've found the best way to deal with [a disruptive pupil] is when you see, as soon as they get involved at any point, you kind of draw attention to them" (BCB A). A musician recalled one disruptive boy whom he complimented in this manner: "…you could tell the change and you know he's trying to hide his smile" (BCB A).

The musicians' patience and compassion is evident in the observation records. Throughout the workshops, pupils displayed challenging behavior. This involved dropping out of the circle and refusing to participate, aggravating other pupils and not listening to instructions from the musicians. The musicians used positive feedback and spent time one-on-one with distressed or shy pupils to entice them to participate. Rather than displaying impatience over pupils' dis-engagement, the musicians remained sensitive to unknown pressures influencing pupil behavior: "…two girls at school yesterday, the week before. They were both not in a great place" (BCB A). "They refused to play…She left the room a couple times as well. But then this week, she's happy" (BCB B). Teachers praised the musicians' approach: "It's been really lovely and Back Chat Brass - their manner with the children and everything - is just perfect. You know, they've got the boundary but they've got the fun element as well, in the fact that it's okay to be a little bit silly. But yeah, really lovely role models for the children" (Primary School A). Perhaps because of the fellowship fostered through group music making, it seems that the "moral imperative to care" extended to the pupils in the In2 music project: our observation records how pupils supported the musicians by gently admonishing "naughty" classmates and encouraging shy or reluctant pupils to join in through eye contact, smiles and applause.

Analysis of our interview and observation data indicates that the answer to the research question is affirmative: the In2 project *has* made a positive contribution to the development of disadvantaged pupils' social capital and wellbeing. The Durham Commission on Creativity and Education (Durham University & ACE, 2019, p. 8) reports, "Young people can find strength, inspiration, consolation and community in their shared experience of creativity", and notes that "connections between personal fulfillment, wellbeing and creativity are well documented" (ibid, p. 39). As an example of creative engagement, it is perhaps not surprising that the In2 music project has enhanced pupils' wellbeing, defined simply as "quality of life" (Diener et al., 2003, p. 405). Parents told us about their children's enthusiasm for the project, whether it be singing the songs at home, playing "air" trumpets and trombones, or talking about Back Chat Brass "non-stop". Teachers shared with us their delight in seeing pupils grow in confidence: "…they've opened up and I think they've become more positive and they've got more self-belief and confidence in themselves. Yeah, it was lovely" (Primary School A). It is clear that the In2 music project brought something special into the children's lives. In February 2020, one musician said, "Hopefully they'll come away thinking, 'Actually, music is great and I want to do more of that, playing together'" (BCB B). In May 2020, this hope turned into reality when a primary head teacher told us that one of their Looked After Children, a "shy, retiring young lady" who took part in the In2 music project, has asked if she can learn to play the trombone, and that her foster parents are planning to support her with music tuition.

Social capital

Social capital refers to the benefits that individuals and communities derive from positive interpersonal relationships (Dewey, 1909). High levels of social capital are associated with "lower crime rates, better health, higher educational achievement and improved economic development" (Wright, 2012, p. 12), making social capital highly desirable. As noted by Robert Putman (1995, p. 66), "For a variety of reasons, life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital". Our study confirms Patrick Jones' (2008, p. 130) theory that music education "can uniquely foster the development of social capital", because playing instruments or singing in a group requires cooperation and coordination of focus over time. As Anita Prest (2016, p. 151) puts it, "Music making, similar to relationships, occurs through time and is the result of concerted effort". The data indicate that pupils in the In2 project developed relationships over time, both with Back Chat Brass and with one another, and it is clear that these relationships sustained pupils' engagement with the project and helped develop their self-confidence.

According to Langston and Barrett (2008, p. 131), fellowship is based on feelings of "trust, camaraderie,

togetherness, friendship, warmth, support and deep appreciation of the feelings and needs of members within a group", and examples of all of these attributes were found in the interview transcripts and observation records. While the indicators of social capital are "many and diverse" (Langston & Barrett, 2008, p. 123), fellowship - defined simply as caring *for* others and being cared for *by* others – is foundational to the positive interpersonal relationships that are at the heart of social capital. The observation record contains an illustrative example of how the In2 music project fostered a sense of fellowship:

> A Year 6 boy struggles to regulate his behavior, shouting out answers and upsetting classmates by telling them to be quiet. He alternates between enthusiasm and non-compliance, often sitting down and refusing to play. Back Chat Brass interact with the boy calmly and kindly, and he continuously drops out and re-joins the circle of pupils. Despite these difficulties, the boy takes part in the performance in front of his schoolmates, teachers and the parents. After the show, the boy cries tears of happiness when his father hugs him and says he is "proud" of him. (Observer)

Warmth, support and togetherness – attributes that are fundamental to fellowship – appear to define this boy's experience of the In2 music project.

Ridge (2013) and Giroux (2015) argue that austerity politics are pushing less affluent individuals further to the margins of society. Research indicates that marginalized people struggle to feel the sense of "belonging" that is fundamental to social capital (Diener et al., 2003), making social capital less accessible to deprived pupils. In the English education system, this sense of "not belonging" often translates into school exclusion (Timpson Review of School Exclusion, 2019)). Many of the children who took part in the In2 music project are experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD) (Community Foundation, 2017; see also OCSI, 2020). A report commissioned recently by the UK Government acknowledges that the risk factors for school exclusion include "parental ill health and disability, unemployment, poverty and poor housing" (Graham et al., 2019, p. 24); phenomena reported as prevalent in the catchment areas of the schools in the In2 music project (OSCI, 2020). The social justice implications of SMD are not restricted to school exclusion, as UK Government data reveal that pupils with SMD consistently fail to reach the same levels of attainment as more privileged children (DfE, 2019).

The In2 music project enabled pupils experiencing SMD to enjoy the benefits of fellowship through group-based music, and to begin to develop the sense of "belonging" upon which social capital is built. It is little wonder, then, that teachers expressed the hope that more children might be able to take part in the project.

Policy implications: the In2 music project in conversation with the special issue

A report commissioned recently by the Musicians' Union claims that "Music education in the United Kingdom is in a perilous state" (Savage & Barnard, 2019, p. 3). Participants in our evaluation of the In2 music project confirm the report's findings that schools lack funding to purchase musical instruments and teachers have insufficient expertise to teach music. As noted by Wright (2012, p. 12), unsatisfactory provision of music in schools means that "music education favors middle-class children from families who can afford for their children to have additional tuition outside the school". The social justice implications of this are twofold. Firstly, it is obviously unfair for parental income to be the determining factor in who gets to play a musical instrument and who does not. Secondly, research indicates that affluent people have higher levels of social capital than do poorer people (Pichler & Wallace, 2009), and that group-based music enhances social capital and wellbeing (Jones, 2008; Langston & Barrett, 2008; Prest, 2016; Weinberg & Joseph, 2017; Wright, 2012). This suggests that wealthier pupils with relatively high levels of social capital are having their social capital and wellbeing further enhanced through music education, while poorer pupils with relatively low levels of social capital and wellbeing are not.

The authors of the Special Issue identify a similar inequality of access to music education. In her study of arts policy in New York City, Cara Faith Bernard (2020, p.30) first notes the "steady decline in arts spending in the NYC Department of Education". She then explores the reversal of this trend by Mayor Bill de Blasio, who pledged in 2014 to "'improve arts education in schools by increasing the arts budget to $23 million" (ibid). Martin, a middle school music teacher, told Bernard that he was not aware of this largesse, and expressed the belief that arts programs tend to exclude poorer children: "Students get intimidated. It's about who you know as a teacher and how you play the game and the politics to get the kids in the door" (Martin in Bernard, 2020, p. 35). Bernard's (ibid, p. 38) participants told her that "many of the citywide arts programs available for students are not universally accessible for all students". Access is dependent, it seems, upon possession of "a set of unwritten qualifications" (ibid, p. 38), which include having been taught music by "well known teachers" (ibid). Martin claims that music programs in Manhattan "attract a particular student from certain neighborhoods" (Martin in Bernard, 2020, p. 35). These programs presumably serve to enlarge the already high levels of social capital that wealthier students possess. As Bernard (ibid, p. 38) puts it, "These students may be seen as winners of the system, the privileged ones".

In their comparison of two case studies in Boston and Baltimore, Conkling and Kaufman (2020) identify the repeal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 as the root cause of inequity in music and other arts provision. In 1978, monies for the provision of the arts in schools became discretionary, and as a result schools began to prioritize "reading and math instruction, special education, and English language

tutoring" (Conkling & Kaufman, 2020, p. 17). With school budgets now dedicated to high-stakes testing and the avoidance of "sanctions" (ibid, p. 16), schools are increasingly reliant on private funding for arts programs. Conkling and Kaufman (2020) argue that the piecemeal delivery of music education identified by Bernard (2020) arises when philanthropic efforts to support the arts lack clarity or consistency. Despite the best of intentions, "an unequal system of arts education is created across a school system" (Conkling & Kaufman, 2020, p. 20), if the "purposes for arts education are clear for some schools and unclear for others", and if "the environment, community dynamics, pedagogy, and learning experiences" (ibid) are not assessed in all schools. De-centralized, ad hoc, and non-regulated provision of the arts creates, it seems, fertile conditions for already privileged students to become "winners of the system" (Bernard, 2020, p. 38).

Ryan Shaw (2020, p. 2) uses the term "policy footprints" to describe how case studies, such as the ones mentioned above, help to "illuminate an important issue" and/or "refine a theory". Shaw acknowledges that "Policy footprints often evidence messy, conflicting views of which agenda is best or most successful" (ibid). If we consider the In2 music project in terms of the "path" walked by Bernard (2020) and Conkling and Kaufman's (2020) case studies, we can see that Darlington Borough Council's decision to target funds directly at students most in need ensured that more privileged students did not monopolize resources, cf. Bernard (2020). However, it is also apparent that the project contributed to what Conkling and Kaufman (2020, p. 20) describe as "an unequal system of arts education" across the school system, not because the project was poorly conceived or evaluated, but because its funding limitations meant that it was not available for all pupils in Darlington's schools, or in schools outside the district. Conking and Kaufman (2020, p. 16) cite Chief Justice Warren's historic claim that state education "is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms". By withdrawing financial support for music education, policy makers in the USA and the UK have signaled that music education is no longer a "universal right", and have left it to sponsors and well-wishers to determine "which agenda is best or most successful" (Shaw, 2020, p. 2). When music programs are provided on a charitable basis, it is perhaps considered churlish to question the efficacy of the philanthropists' "gift" of music to deprived students, or to suggest that such an intervention is "therapeutic engagement with excluded people" (Furedi, 2004, p. 106), and that such therapy is culturally enervating (ibid). It seems that the unequal provision evident in the Special Issue and the In2 music project is still possible on the grounds that some music education of this kind is better than not having it at all, and that it may perhaps inspire policy makers to consider reinstating dedicated arts funding.

In his Special Issue study of a project by Dalouge Smith and the San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory in Chula Vista, California, Bruce Carter (in Carter & Roucher, 2020) implies that the problem facing music education is not simply that it lacks funding or prestige:

> Often we in nonprofits mistakenly think the challenge is in the curriculum, or time, or enough instruments, or finding the teachers. In fact, we have noticed a lot of programs that had all of these things in place still fail to survive or grow. What sometimes matters most are the systematic design decisions related to school day schedule and how schedules impact student access to the arts at all grades (Carter in Carter & Roucher, 2020, p.26).

If Carter is correct, the social justice implications of his observation are significant. By rejecting the belief that music education is a universal human right, policy makers in the USA and the UK have enabled the reorientation of curricula toward numeracy and literacy as "rights", with the result that timetabling in both countries precludes music instruction, even when appropriate funding and expertise are available. Instead of being a right, learning to play an instrument is positioned by policy makers as an "option" to be engaged with as an extra-curricular activity. As already noted, extra-curricular music opportunities are predominantly accessed by wealthier families. While such consequences are the effect of economic and political decisions, critics such as Eisner (2004) argue that only the children of members of the professional and managerial classes – "winners of the system, the privileged ones" (Bernard, 2020, p.38) – receive the intangible benefits of arts education as a privilege – while poorer children are deprived of what should be theirs too by right.

UNESCO's Second World Conference on Arts Education, held in 2010, resulted in the production of *The Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education*. The Seoul Agenda set an international standard for arts education, concluding that it:

> …has an important role to play in the constructive transformation of educational systems that are struggling to meet the needs of learners in a rapidly changing world characterized by remarkable advances in technology on the one hand and intractable social and cultural injustices on the other. (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2)

Eisner (2004) too looked at arts education and saw that it offers hope for social reform:

> Imagination is no mere ornament, nor is art. Together they can liberate us from our indurated habits. They might help us restore decent purpose to our efforts and help us create the kind of schools our children deserve and our culture needs. (Eisner, 2004, p. 11)

Furedi (2004) and others look at arts education and see the same: that arts education can liberate us from our "indurated habits" (Eisner, 2004, p. 11); that effective arts education programmes might help inspire us to "create the kinds of schools our children deserve and our culture needs" (ibid). Policy makers are not deaf to the

claims made by Eisner (2004) and other arts educators and researchers. However, in an environment that is both highly regulated and constrained in resources by a long period of austerity, by the commodification of childhood experience, and competition between different areas of the curriculum, policy makers are poorly incentivised to prioritize activities that deliver benefits that are less tangible or harder to measure.

Conclusion

The In2 project used music education to develop the wellbeing and social capital of children experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD), who are at significant risk of school failure (DfE, 2019). Although we are told that high levels of social capital are associated with "lower crime rates, better health, higher educational achievement and improved economic development" (Wright, 2012, p. 12), and that "life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital" (Putman, 1995, p. 66), there seems to be a lack of political will to employ music education as a means of endowing disadvantaged young people with social capital. Until policy makers acknowledge music education as a human right, and are willing to embrace its potential, it seems likely that many more researchers and educators will trace "policy footprints" (Shaw, 2020, p. 2) with no clearly set direction.

In their call for evidence to inform the National Plan for Music Education, the UK Government states, "Our ambitions for music education are high – the opportunity to study and understand music isn't a privilege, it's a vital part of a broad and balanced curriculum" (DfE, 2020, p. 5). Yet it seems that in the UK, policy makers are shy of acknowledging what our study hopes to have demonstrated: that music education supports the development of pupils' wellbeing and social capital, and that these benefits are being denied to socio-economically disadvantaged children. As noted by Shaw (2020, p. 7), each policy situation "represents a somewhat familiar cadence" of dwindling music resources, accountability pressures, and inadequate music training for teachers. In 2020, Darlington Borough Council heard this cadence, and provided funding to enable musicians to work with pupils at risk of school drop-out and failure. The results were impressive: teachers described how previously shy and anxious pupils began to be more responsive in lessons, and parents reported their children's enthusiasm for the project. The local community nominated the In2 music project to receive additional funding from Persimmon Homes' Building Futures, a charity established by house builders, which reveals the extent of local support for the cultivation of deprived children's wellbeing and social capital (The Northern Echo, 2020).

In2 thus provides a successful model of partnership for policy makers and for local authorities to follow. As outlined by the Seoul Agenda, this project places "arts education as the foundation for balanced creative, cognitive, emotional, esthetic and social development of children" (UNESCO, 2010, p. 3). The benefits to the children involved have been greater, as the schools have not viewed music education as a luxury or extracurricular option but as a valued component of the school's learning culture. The project has also sought to develop capacity both in teachers in those schools and in the musicians taking part in In2, seeding the possibility of further In2 cohorts. In being able to evidence the cognitive and social, as well as educational, benefits to the children that take part – higher levels of social capital and self-efficacy, a stronger sense of connection to their school and local community and, in some cases, the desire to continue studying and playing music– In2 is able to demonstrate return on investment to funders, and intrinsic value to policy makers. If the downward trend in the provision of music education is to be reversed, then initiatives such as this need not only to be supported, but their value demonstrated to those indifferent to the threat of music education and of its benefits becoming enjoyed only by a privileged few.

Note

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