

Paula is a music lecturer at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), where she is director of the USQ Junior Academy of Music. She works extensively with children of all ages developing music and movement programs.



Q & A

Interview with Paula Melville-Clark

1. You are the director of the USQ Junior Academy of Music. What drew you to the area of music and early childhood?

Teaching music and movement classes to young children is only a small part of my work as Director of the USQ Junior Academy of Music. I conduct classes for early childhood right through to tertiary students. I think when you work with such a broad age-range and wide ability level, there is a natural tendency to be aware of the whole process of educating musicians – to go back to the beginning and endeavour to make sense of the whole journey. I'm very drawn to teaching music to young children because it's so rewarding and such a privilege to be involved with touching and shaping young lives.

2. Do you think musical play is still on the periphery of many early childhood programs? If so, in what ways can it be made more of a priority?

Musical play is sometimes one of the least understood of subject areas within the early childhood curriculum and is, therefore, often on the periphery of many early childhood programs. If it is to be made more of a priority then we need to firstly convey the importance of music education in the development of the whole child to those involved; for example, curriculum

developers, academics, educators. To do this, we need more research in the area to support the case for including music more prominently in the early childhood curriculum. Secondly, teachers need to be aware of when and how they can include music in the daily lives of the children in their care. This takes specialist training, which will require musically qualified and experienced early childhood practitioners in our universities to teach student teachers, as well as units of study devoted to music education as opposed to including music within general expressive arts units.

3. A big part of your work is focused on music combined with movement. What does this sometimes involve? How does this combination assist with the development of children?

As a Dalcroze-trained teacher, I am intensely aware of the dominant sensory systems of learning (that is, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) and endeavour to provide a range of these experiences in my classes. Music is not only experienced by the ear and eye alone. It is also innately physical. Music evokes a natural desire, particularly in young children, to move. By tapping into this natural response, children or indeed people of any age, can experience the music in the body. Learning through movement

and muscular sensation is the kinaesthetic response. In a typical early childhood music and movement class, children may be seen skipping, running and jumping; manipulating props like balls, hoops and fabric; creating their own musical play through movement games and enjoying songs and chants with actions. Teaching music through movement is a powerful tool with young children who enjoy exploring their world through moving. I would describe my approach as 'holistic' because it taps into the whole development and response of the child. Music brings all the senses together and, if guided appropriately, can assist in the development of the physical, emotional, cognitive and sensory capacities.

4. What inspires you about early childhood?

Children are like little sponges soaking up information. They learn so much and so quickly and they are so desirous and full of energy. Young children always want to know what other instruments and props I have in the cupboard and what other songs I know. They want to have a go at playing the piano when I play. And they all want to hold hands with me in the circle or be the one to sit on my lap when we sing a song. Is that enough to inspire anyone?!

5. In your own childhood, Paula:

a. Who did you most want to be?

I recall when I was quite young I used to play 'schools' with my dolls and use the inside of my wardrobe door as a chalk board (imagine all that chalk dust!). I think I must have always been a teacher in the making but I don't recall modelling myself on anyone in particular.

b. What was your first memory of music?

There was a lot of music in our house. My father played the piano and the banjo and my parents had a good collection of classical and popular gramophone records that I would often play. Jorge Bolet playing Chopin was one of my favourites. Sing-a-longs with my father at the piano were daily events. At five years old I could do a great imitation of English pop star Cilla Black singing *Anyone who ever had a heart*, although when I made my debut singing performance at the local music festival my voice was inaudible. I can still see my father standing at the back of the hall and wondering why he was making huge gestures with his arms while I was singing. At six years old I started formal piano lessons and the rest is history.

c. What was your most magical experience?

The whole of my childhood was a magical experience. I was fortunate to have wonderful parents who provided a loving environment with plenty of encouragement and opportunity. Family friends and teachers also made an impact on my childhood and I have many happy memories. Perhaps this is why I love to enter the world of the young child. One of the mothers of a child in my three-year-old class stated recently that she (her daughter) laughed more in music class than at any other time. It's true. We do laugh a lot and there is a lot of joy sharing the world of our little ones. As Susan Young (University of Exeter, UK) reminded me



in some recent correspondence, when it comes down to it, we shouldn't forget the intrinsic value of music and the fact that it is simply lots of fun.

6. What are the issues you're most passionate about right now?

I'm very aware that many early childhood practitioners have had limited training and experience of music education in early childhood, both in the university context and in ongoing in-service opportunities. I see many teachers and carers struggle to conduct music sessions because they simply do not have the necessary skills. It disturbs me to see good teachers who are unable to engage effectively in musical experiences with the children, especially when music is so important to a child's development. I would like to see an accredited program set up in Australia that provides appropriate music education training to educators in the field of early childhood and where current practitioners would be able to gain accreditation through attendance at residential schools.

I am also aware that there are limited resources for teaching music education in early childhood, particularly in music and movement programs, and am currently working on compiling a song book, CDs and lesson plans to be published shortly for use in the early childhood context.

7. When it comes to the education of Australian children, particularly in the early years, what do you think children most need, and what would you like to see more of?

I can only really comment on the area of music education. We are aware of the critical importance of the first years of life for all aspects of later development. There is now enough evidence emerging from research around the world to suggest that music is fundamental to the early development of the child. I believe all children, regardless of socio-economic status and other issues,



should have access to good quality music programs in the early years. A good-quality music education includes experience with a qualified and experienced practitioner and involves moving, singing, listening and playing activities. It fosters creativity through musical learning, uses developmentally appropriate teaching methods, develops physical, emotional, intellectual and sensory capacities and is conducted in a positive and enjoyable learning environment.

8. Who are, or have been, the most influential people in your career?

In the last decade, the people who have most influenced my career are Associate Professor Laurie Lepherd (retired, USQ), who supervised my Masters research and challenged and encouraged me to pursue this area of music education. Wendy Lorenz who was, until recently, Head of Music at USQ – who supported my work and was integral in launching the Junior Academy of Music and inviting me on staff. I have been fortunate to study with Dalcroze exponents: Sandra Nash and Joan Pope OAM, and am indebted to them for my training in this area. Finally, Ros Beeton, former Director of Chiselhurst Kindergarten in Toowoomba, who took me under her wing and helped to open my eyes to the world of how young children learn.

For more information on the work Paula does, go to: www.usq.edu.au/jam. Similarly, if you're interested in Paula's workshops, contact her directly at: clarkp@usq.edu.au.



Photos courtesy of University of Southern Queensland