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CPL Podcast: Music Reading K-6

Host: Carly Boreland
With: Graham Sattler

[XYLOPHONE MUSIC]

Carly Boreland:
Welcome to the JPL Podcast for the New South Wales Teachers Federation, Centre for Professional Learning. I'm Carly Boreland and I'm the editor of the JPL. I'm talking with Graham Sattler about teaching music reading skills for the purposes of playing instruments in K-6 classes. Graham, welcome!

Graham Sattler:
G'day Carly; how you going?

Carly Boreland:
Welcome back to the JPL Podcast as well. We've had you and your ukulele here before and we're going to have a chat this time about how you can take things a bit further with music in your classroom, and really importantly, how you approach the almost difficult, or perhaps challenging thing for teachers which is teaching students to read music, amongst everything else that's going on in primary school. Can you tell us firstly about *why* this is so important? We know it's in the syllabus, but *why* is the teaching of music reading skills, as part of playing musical instruments, really important from K to 6?

Graham Sattler:
I guess the first thing is that it is not really a very difficult thing. A lot of people think that it's very complex or very demanding, I suppose like reading another language. In fact, I'd suggest that written music, particularly conventional western notation which is what we're usually dealing with, it's really more like reading a map, I would suggest, (that is fairly detailed), but more like reading a map than it is like reading a different language. It's quite graphic, to start with, and it does give you quite a few details about how to express and how to achieve the different elements of music in the concepts that are actually prescribed by the syllabus.

So, it's important for a number of reasons. Both the teacher in the classroom and also the children, knowing that what they're doing, what they're recreating I suppose, is reliable and actually correct. And why does it matter that it's correct? For the children to feel confident in what they're doing – I think that's a fairly significant and important thing. So, learning to *decode* written music, which is really what we're talking about, can reinforce the children's sense of confidence in what they're doing. It also means that there is reliability for them in reproducing what it is, and it gives the teacher, and the students, an opportunity to be able to go back to it and develop what they're doing and be reliable; feel that they're reliable and accurate in what they're doing.

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There are also broader learning areas and learning skills that can be developed by learning to decode the written music. The basic ability of literacy, the outcome of literacy, is certainty aided and assisted by learning to "read" music, to decode, which is really what I think literacy in that sense is about. And because it isn't written out as a language (words, just words, with particular grammar and particular sounds to decode from the letters), there are a number of visual cues that really are quite graphic, and so that also means that children who may not find reading language as a simple or a straight forward process or have ease with that, can often decode music (and I am deliberately being tedious here in saying "decode" rather than read), can decode the cues and the details in a music score in a way that they may not have the same ability, or the same access, to decoding language. So, there is the literacy benefit of recognising symbols and sequences that transfers to other areas of literacy. There's also that way in for children who may not necessarily be able to, or as I say "decode language", [who] can get used to decoding different symbols and different sequences.

Another very interesting thing with the way that music is written is if you think about the fact that music relies on, and actually measures time, that temporal area (it actually relies on time; music can't exist without the passage of time, it measures it and actually marks time), so when you're reading music, there's an implicit progression of time that is occurring. Most music, written music, will give an indication of the speed, for instance, the pulse, the rate at which the music goes (whether it's fast or slow, the degree to whether it's fast or slow) and so that actually sets up an temporal area, or a temporal consideration, that the music, as it's written, has to fit within to. So, there's a sequential element there, or a sequential dimension, and there's also that progressing through time, so those things are very useful for developing spatial awareness as well; spatial awareness not only being a physical dimension, but also a spatial awareness in seeing and appreciating the difference between notes on a page, the placement in time. Those things are developmentally really very valuable and do transfer to other learning areas, and that's why it's very important for children to be given the opportunity to learn to read music in the classroom. And I say "opportunity" because it's also absolutely fine for children to develop that skill and that ability at their own rate – it *is* key.

Carly Boreland:
I like how you connect all those things together when you talk about the "why". We spend a lot of time talking about why we do things in these podcasts because it helps you with that intellectual level and understanding before you go start attempting to try things at your classroom. And I was thinking as you were talking about (probably three) points there; that music reading skills is a technical necessity for having a musical confidence in and of itself, but then it has these skills that are transferrable to literacy and numeracy, particularly with the literacy one where you talk about "decoding". I know that people that talk about the English syllabus and "decoding" say that that's got a really important point because it's not just "transcribing" or "unlocking" but it's actually using that to give meaning and to understand what the meaning is so that you can then go on and interpret, and create as well. It made me think when you talk about "decoding", you're sort of saying "What is the creator of this music trying to do here; what are they trying to achieve here?"

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Graham Sattler:
Yes, and that's a fantastic point. If we make the assumption that the music that's been chosen is well written or well-constructed (it's not a very difficult thing to find, to select, to source music that is well written), so given that it's well written, well-constructed, the way that the speed, if you like, of the music (whether or not it has words, whether or not there's a vocal component), the speed of the piece, the phrasing (and of course music is phrased similarly to language being phrased), the expressive qualities of the music, are likely to be structured in such a way that is not only pleasing but also quite logical, in terms of processing and sequencing – particularly sequencing. There is a logic that is *likely* to be there, that is also *likely* to be appealing and accessible to the student. And seeing it graphically in front of you, as well as singing or playing whatever it is that you're doing, seeing the way that fits into a matrix, if you like, is very logical and satisfying and accessible.

And the thing about music, again as I mentioned of course, it exists in time. There's scaffolding with the way it works. It is innately mathematical, in the way that it is structured. So, there again we have both the literacy and numeracy areas being satisfied and developed. It can be very satisfying and very logical and that will appeal, largely, to children when they're learning. In terms of a reliable basis for teaching, for teachers that is also appealing – it's quantifiable. Anything that's well-structured like that gives lots of opportunities to explain structure and explain logic, if you like, and rationale, and those things, I think, are enormously helpful. My sense is that if children aren't given the opportunity to learn to decode written music (it doesn't have to be complicated), then they're missing out on an opportunity to really engage in a tangible expression of, well, you know, in numeracy and literacy, and also logic and also that sort of structure. So, the other great thing is that when they come back to playing that piece, or singing that piece, they know that they're going back to a reliable structure.

The other wonderful thing, I think, about written music, playing or singing from written music, is that the system that we use is many hundreds of years old (that in itself is interesting) and it has been developed to a point of giving a great deal of detail without impeding the individual's ability or rights to interpret, to a degree, to express their emotions through it. There's a lot of detail (again, coming back to the elements, all the musical concepts of pitch, duration involving rhythm and beat etcetera, dynamics, you know, the louds and the softs, the style of the piece, the tone, colours; all of those things are indicated by written music) but they can all be learnt and decoded in a graded way so that it doesn't become overly demanding and doesn't become overly complex.

The other thing of course is the way that *pitch* is indicated on staves is very graphic; low notes, literally, are lower than the higher notes – notes that are one above the other are very close and that's where music is like reading a map. You can see the contour of the tune; you can see then the distance in terms of the rhythms and the patterns, you can see the physical spaces between the notes, so again, the spatial awareness is very clear in the spatial relativity. So, it is a reliable system of recording and indicating what is required of the actual music, which of course, is the aural art form. What we read isn't music that's notation, but it's an opportunity to record and indicate what we want to hear. It can be very clear and very precise and still leave a good deal of ability for the individual, or the group, (whether that

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individual is the conductor, the teacher or the individual performer) to interpret in their own way – it's a very reliable and structured artefact.

Carly Boreland:
And we're talking about how all K-6 teachers can make this happen in their classroom. I know that there is sometimes a concern that "I couldn't do that" or "It wouldn't be possible", but what we're saying, I suppose, is that all students need to have the opportunity to read and to play music. And that all teachers need to feel like this is something they can do.

Graham Sattler:
It's something that is accessible.

Carly Boreland:
We're going to play around with some different things in this podcast today because we have some audio recording from a course, a CPL course, for teaching exactly what we're talking about, and the teachers were there making this music, so we're going to include some examples of that, and I suppose what we're really saying is that we think all teachers should have these kinds of opportunities and that's the only way that all students are going to do this. And when you were talking about connecting music to literacy and numeracy it's worth saying, I think, that whilst those two things are hugely important, having opportunities like this for *all* students is really important too, and to emphasise that even our most "needy" students need these opportunities, and that the pressures of literacy and numeracy, or English and Mathematics, ought not receive the *full* curriculum.

Graham Sattler:
That's exactly right and of course making music is a joyful experience and it's a bonding experience. Music in the classroom is a tremendous opportunity, a tremendous offering, I guess, for children and teachers alike, to bond with this common, celebratory activity, and opportunity to make music which is all about expressing emotion and communicating emotion, and there are few things as uplifting, as I think we all know, as making music together, contributing together, and expressing yourself.

I guess the thing about reading music, (and normally we're talking in this context about sighted children and teachers who are able to read, to have the vision to read, but of course there is music (but we're not going to talk about that in great deal today) written in braille and there are other alternative options to benefit from music literacy and other types of music literacy) but you're right in that, it's great to have those broader values and broader benefits. But we shouldn't forget that the *joy* of making music, the benefits of developing peer support and team work, real self and group esteem, those things that come from the very joyful activity of making music, that in and of itself, is a really important reason for maintaining, continuing and developing delivery of music in the classroom.

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Carly Boreland:
So, we're going to get stuck into *doing* the music side of it; how you do it, the practicalities of it; the technicalities of it. And we're going to start first with what we think is everybody's most accessible instrument, which is their voice, and talk about how we do that. We're going from Kindergarten to Year 6, is what we're about talking here, so we're saying that *everybody*, students with special needs can have access points as well, *everybody* from K to 6 can be learning music reading skills at an appropriate level.

So, Graham, do you want to start by telling us how you can use voice, and then, we've got some ukuleles, we've got some xylophones…

Graham Sattler:
We've got it all here! This is fantastic!
Yes, for sure. So, I guess if we think again "What's the purpose of written music?" there are a couple of purposes. The first one is *record music* (to have a facility or technique for recording gorgeous music that we're making) and then being able to go back to that artefact or that record, if you like, to recreate and then create from that point. As you say, generally speaking we *all* have a voice and we *all* have the ability to differentiate, to be musical, and with our voice, I suppose that requires differentiating with pitch (again coming back to the musical concepts in the syllabus), so we've got pitch, we've got rhythm, we've got tone, colour, we've got duration, dynamics; so, differentiating with pitch and adding rhythm gives us *melody*. So, *all* music is based on melody to kick off with.

So, we get a classroom, for instance, to sing something. Now, we want to be able to define very clearly between pitch, as if we're thinking of them like steps, so generally speaking we don't want to be [HUMMING in sliding pitch 'Hmmmm'] sliding around pitches; we want to be able to be fairly accurate so that we're able to sing a song. We have the children sing and we can start with them singing a song they know, which might be, I don't know – it could be anything, I think we even did "Frère Jacques" last time we were in this very room, but something that they know even if it's (if we're talking about very early Stage 1/infants) [SINGS 'Three blind mice…'] – you know, a nice song about farmers and things, not necessarily violence but you know [SINGS 'Three blind mice…'], or it could be [SINGS 'Hot cross buns…'], or it could be any sort of tune.
So, let's say it was "Hot Cross Buns" for instance…

SINGS:
Hot cross buns
Hot cross buns
One a penny, two a penny
Hot cross buns.

…Pre-decimal currency song there for you.

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So, what's important with a song like that? It's important that we hear those pitches or we don't *recognise* it. If we [SINGS off tune 'Hot cross buns…'], that's not going to be quite so clear. So, we might want to indicate, and if we talking about initially sighted children or a group of largely sighted children [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'we would help to indicate with our hands in the air at different heights'] so it's clearly [SINGS 'Hot cross buns']. And we might use *solfa* or we might just start by [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'indicating with different heights'] in the air with our hands. So, we're making it very clear to them that [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'those are distinct pitches'] and in that song there are three whole notes (isn't that fantastic) [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'three, two, one'], so there's the relativity of each of those notes to each other, we're [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'we're moving down in steps, going down the steps'] and then the opposite [SINGS to tune of "One a penny, two a penny" 'da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da']

So, how would we write that down? We might then say, for instance, we might choose to use *solfa*, you know that [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'Mi, Re, Do'] and this is something that's quite a good tool in classrooms from infants and even pre-infants, if you like. We might do [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'Mi, Re, Do…Mi, Re, Do']. Now, that's just, again, evidencing that they're quite separate pitches.

Now, great! A song like that; why not? It's a fantastic place to start. We might write that on the board. Now, if we want to indicate notes/different pitches that were [SINGS to tune of "Hot cross buns" 'going down in steps'], we might write (on the board) "Mi" or we might write "3", if we write on the "Three Blind Mice", we might write the "3" [SINGS to tune of "Three Blind Mice" 'above the "blind" and then below that "mice"'] so that we can see that there is a vertical hierarchy, if you like. [SINGS to tune of "Three Blind Mice" 'And then we point to that'] so the kids can see then that we're talking about higher notes and lower notes. We might then do that in solfa [SINGS to tune of "Three Blind Mice" 'Mi, Re, Do'], same thing – the "Mi" above the "Re" above the "Do".

On that sort of plane, that's beautiful. How does that relate to conventionally written music? Well, we might then, for instance, draw a *stave*, and the *stave* being the five lines that music is usually written on. We might use the [number] "3" or we might do "Mi", "Re", "Do", but whatever we do, we put one note, maybe on the second space from the bottom, [SINGS to the pitch of "Do" 'and then the next note'] (it doesn't have to have a particular rhythm) on the line below that; [SINGS to the pitch of "Re" 'and then the next note on the line below that'] so we can see [SINGS to pitch of "Mi" 'higher note'], [SINGS to pitch of "Re" 'middle note'], [SINGS to pitch of "Do" 'lower note'] on a music stave. Now, immediately, there's that spatial recognition. We might then convert that and actually add the rhythm, so, we might do that as *crotchets* or *quarter notes* (the coloured in notes with the stem). If we know that we're reading music, we might do an "A" and then a "G" and then an "F", or it might be and it might be a "G" and a "F", or a "G", "F", "E flat (E♭)" or something like that, the important thing is that we can see the relativity of those notes.

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Carly Boreland:
And Graham, sorry to interrupt; the other important thing is that so far we haven't called something an "A" or called it a "B"…

Graham Sattler:
Doesn't matter; no, that's exactly right. And we haven't, for people for whom this language is meaningful, we haven't put a *clef* at of the beginning of the *stave* – we've just got those five lines because that's reliable, recognisable music lines; you know, music script, so that's fine. All we want to see very much (and that comes back to reading the map), we want to see the contour – we want to see a higher note going down a step, going down a step, and then going back to the higher note, down a step, down a step. So we start to get used to the *contour* and *that* is "melody reading".

Frequently, you might be in a group, or I might find myself in a group of people who say they can't read music, and I would say "Well, you may not think at this point that you can", but I would hand them the music. And in most cases, from the very first session of singing in a choir, a class, or whatever it is, I would normally use written music, even if the children say they can't read it. I can't see anything to be lost by reading, if there are words, reading the words underneath notes because getting used to the fact that the contour (where notes are placed on a stave), getting used to the significance of where they sit geographically, or physically on that map that is the stave, gets them used to the fact that there is meaning in that. Now, detail about note length, detail about what the notes are called, whether it's an "A" or a "G" or a "D" or an "F", those things are details that will start to gain significance as you move on, but it's absolutely unnecessary to pack all of the required awareness.

For somebody to qualify, to start to use music, they don't need to know all of that stuff – all of those details can be added in later and this is the whole point about music reading being like reading a map. And if you see a note that's clearly just the next step up from another note, I can almost guarantee you that you will go to the right place from the starting note – if I give you the starting note and then show you a note that is clearly one step above, I can almost guarantee you that you will get that note right because visually it's very logical, it's very rational. There, we are already developing spatial awareness, in that way, and we're already understanding a code, which is music. And then, of course, when we have that music with words, if it's vocal music for instance, and there are words there, again, if it's a well-constructed song, it doesn't have to be genius, but if it's well constructed, then there will be a logic when it comes to intonation, and there'll be a logic when it comes to the rhythm and phrasing of the words. So, the music is most likely going to aid with expression and the intonation and the communicative requirements of the text.

Carly Boreland:
And we've got a really nice example of "Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree" that we can share.

Graham Sattler:
Beautiful.

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[RECORDING PLAYS]

GROUP SINGING:
Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree
Merry, merry king of the bush is he
Laugh, kookaburra, laugh
Kookaburra, gay your life must be.
Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree
Merry, merry king of the bush is he...

Graham Sattler:
Stop! Beautiful! So, let's just clap the song – ready, after 2; 1, 2.

[GROUP CLAPPING TO RHYTHM/BEAT OF 'Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree']

Graham Sattler:
Right, so what is that? What are we left with?

Course Participant:
The rhythm.

Graham Sattler:
The rhythm; that is it! That is it!

[RECORDING ENDS]

Carly Boreland:
Can you talk us through a little bit about what you were doing with your class? Now, that's a class of adults but we would use that song with a group of students as well?

Graham Sattler:
Yes, absolutely! We use that "Kookaburra" as an example and it's a great example too. When we were also thinking about the concepts, and within the concepts that is in the syllabus that is called "Duration", we have what is "Beat" and we have "Rhythm", and it's *really* important to be able to differentiate between those two things. And when we're thinking about "Rhythm", rhythm is the *pattern* of a piece, or the section of music, you take the pitch away. So, where as we would sing…

SINGS:
Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree
Merry, merry...

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…we've got the rhythm, the pattern of the notes; we've also got the pitch. And, if we take the pitch away, we'd get something like…

[SOFTLY CLAPS the rhythm of "Kookaburra sits in the old gum tree; Merry, merry king…"]

…Just the rhythm; that's if we're clapping, or we could tap it, or whatever we wanted to do with it.

So we did this one with the class just to really clearly demonstrate rhythm without any pitch whatsoever. The subdivisions, if you like, of the pulse or of the *beat*, give us that pattern. And then when a little later on, we added the pitches, we were able to hear too that the changes, any changes in pitches had to be very, very clear so that we recognised the song, so that it had all those elements – that's why we did that. And it can also be used as a "round" which gets us into one of the other musical concepts which gives us "Harmony" (which is two or more notes sounding good together). And of course the other thing is when you write a song like that, of "Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree" out, the changes [SINGS to the tune of "Kookaburra Sits in the Old Gum Tree" 'are very clear, and their little'], their either steps or their just very small leaps, [SINGS to same tune 'bomp, bomp, bomp, bomp …'] it's a great one then to transfer to a written stave because you can very, very clearly see what the contour is.

Carly Boreland:
So we introduce the music with the beat and the rhythm and the melody, and then when you think the timing is about right and we want to start singing the song all together, then we introduce the sheet music and just do it.

Graham Sattler:
That's right! And just do it!

Carly Boreland:
Don't over explain it...

Graham Sattler:
No! That's right.

Carly Boreland:
…Just do it!

Graham Sattler:
That's exactly right; just do it. So, in a way, it's then seeing in notation what we've done (which is essentially record what we're singing) act as a very reliable aid in reproducing what we're singing.

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Carly Boreland:
And then the conversation after that can be "What did you notice about what the music on the sheet is doing and what we're doing?

Graham Sattler:
That's right!

[RECORDING PLAYS]

UKULELE MUSIC AND GROUP SINGING:
In the jungle
The mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
In the jungle
The mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
Weeheeheehee, dee heeheeheehee, weeoh aweem away
Weeheeheehee, dee heeheeheehee, weeoh aweem away

[RECORDING FADES AND ENDS]

Carly Boreland:
So we got that finishing point and it sounds fabulous together and we should say, I suppose, we're talking about teaching music reading skills in a fully aural and only audio setting here…

Graham Sattler:
Yeah, we are; which is a challenge but, again, a great one.

Carly Boreland:
…so lets go backwards. We've got these guys playing; how do we get there? What are the steps to get them playing this; to get them going with "in the jungle"? And it sounded pretty good!

Graham Sattler:
Yeah, it did sound pretty good! That's exactly right.

One of the great things to consider is that when we're looking at written music, (again, we talked about how logical it is in terms of how it is written out, particularly these days when everything is computer generated so we're not relying too much on hand writing, which is good), but for instance when we're looking at scores, there are different sorts of scores – there's the very traditional/conventional score which will have staves on it. Frequently it will have a piano part which will take up two staves (you know, one for the right hand, one for the left hand). It will have a vocal part, so a third stave, or it

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might have anything up to twenty instrumental lines on them (on the conductor score that the person conducting or leading sees). And, again, with the individual parts, let's say it's a choral score, it will have a few vocals parts; an instrumental [score] might just have the one instrument for each player; but when we look at the score we can see a lot of information.

We might also have the graphic score which might be pictures, and typically for a young children's percussion ensemble, or something, it might even be something like a series of boxes (and again, music is measuring time, so there is a sequence – you play in the one box and the next one) but whatever it is, it's graphic instructions of what to play, and when. You might also have something that looks not much more than a sheet of words but with letters to indicate the chord above the syllables of the particular word so you know when to add something. We investigated two types of musical scores for "The Lion Sleeps Tonight", I seem to remember, and one of them is ukulele by the way. How about that?

Carly Boreland:
I knew it was coming!

Graham Sattler:
Imagine and you shall receive!

[TUNING THE UKULELE]

So, one of the sheets [SINGS in no particular tune 'had the words'] and then it had chords; it had a C [PLAYS C chord on the ukulele] and it had an F [PLAYS F chord] and it had a G7 [PLAYS G7 chord], just those letters. So, C [PLAYS C chord], F [PLAYS F chord] and G7 [PLAYS G7 chord] above particular words. So would look at the sheet, and this a way of writing music, I suppose, and it just said "In the jungle" [PLAYS C chord], so if I didn't know the rhythm, I would be in trouble here, "In the jungle [PLAYS C chord], the mighty jungle [PLAYS F chord], the lion sleeps [PLAYS C chord then G chord] tonight." So, I wouldn't necessarily know what to do but by looking at that I'd know that it was [PLAYS C chord and SINGS 'In the jungle'] or even if I knew the tune

PLAYS UKULELE & SINGS:
In the jungle,
The mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight.

OK. So I can see where the words are, I can see where to play the chords, and that is about it and that's OK.

We had another version of it where the music was absolutely written out and we could tell from that (we could see) the notes to sing [SINGS to tune of "The lion sleeps tonight" 'dah dum dah dum dah dum'], all of those pitches and rhythms were clear, and then it also had tabs, or little things that are like

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graphic indications of how to play, or where to put the fingers for the ukulele (and you also have for the guitar) so that we knew when to play. And then there was also an indication of the strumming pattern which was [PLAYS the ukulele whilst talking] something like this (and you'll excuse the slightly out of tune ukulele [PLAYING stops], it's one of the ukulele's many charms, by the way) so we knew from reading that, it went…

PLAYS UKULELE & SINGS:
In the jungle
The mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
In the jungle
The mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight.

Now in addition to that, if only I had a xylophone - Bing!...Oh, here's one! Haha.
[NOISE as Graham puts ukulele away and reaches down to pick up a xylophone]
It's a long way down!

Carly Boreland:
[Giggling] And you said that it's one of the ukulele's charm, to be slightly out of tune, but it's *all* ukuleles' charm, to be...

Graham Sattler:
It is!

Carly Boreland:
…to be slightly *in* tune, almost.

Graham Sattler:
You're absolutely right.

Carly Boreland:
It really is moveable.

Graham Sattler:
It is moveable, that's exactly right!

Now on this same music we could see where the chords change, as I said before, and [SINGS 'we could [PLAYS a note on xylophone] add the [PLAYS a couple of notes on xylophone] xylophone. And so we could have some people just playing [PLAYS a note on xylophone] [SINGS in no particular tune

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'just with a chord change'] [PLAYS a note on xylophone] and the great thing about xylophones, the xylophones that you often find in classrooms, is that they have the note names written on the bars. Now that's great because you can read that and you might think "What are you learning [PLAYS at regular intervals C, F, G, notes on xylophone whilst talking] if you are just playing what you're reading?" If it's telling you that it's a C, an F and a C, G, but of course, the thing is you are getting used to the intervals – that you can *see* [PLAYS STOPS] the intervals are on the xylophone – and that's great because, again, we're talking about spatial awareness and we are talking about learning by decoding what sounds and what the relative pitches will be.

And of course, you then, with some other people on the xylophone, we're taking the next step were reading the vocal line and playing [PLAYS xylophone to words of "In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight"] the tune which was fantastic. So we had something like this [PLAYS xylophone to both the words and chords of 'In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight' simultaneously] going on, which was fantastic; so we were *adding* elements and it meant that *everybody* in the class was either singing, playing the ukulele, playing the xylophone – in fact, I think that everyone in the class was singing and playing the ukulele or singing and playing the xylophone. And then of course we moved onto the other wonderful instrument, which is the Boomwhacker.

Carly Boreland:
Whoahhh…

Graham Sattler:
Boomwhackers are a fantastic development. They are plastic cylinders of different lengths, and they are, of course [BANGS boomwhacker 3 times] pitched, because they are plastic cylinders; right? That's what happens, if you bang them on something *safe*, so that's on my [BANGS boomwhacker 3 times] wrist, and that's a beautiful, for what it's worth, that's a lovely "F". The other great thing about boomwhackers is that they're colour coded so each note has its own particular colour. And, in terms of mixed abilities, and mixed physical abilities in a classroom, these are pretty easy to make sounds with, they're not just toys. Similarly, we're talking about "The Lion Sleeps Tonight", and we're talking about anything for the guitar or a ukulele that has the letters for the chords, like C, D, E, F, or whatever. So, when we did "In the jungle" with our lovely participants in the course, we had some people playing the boomwhackers.

Not only can you play them [BANGS boomwhacker 3 times] individually but you can also play them [BANGS two boomwhackers together 3 times to create harmony], you can hit them with one another and you get *harmony*, which is very, very beautiful. And, let me see; we can quite easily (so reading the "In the jungle" music) just with those chord symbols we could be playing [BANGS two boomwhackers 3 times to create harmony again]. So, we can not only play them individually, we can play them to make chords; we can make harmony. We can hit one on the other [BANGS two different combinations of boomwhackers together 3 times each to create various harmonies]

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BANGS BOOMWHACKERS & SINGS:
In the jungle
The mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight
In the jungle
The mighty jungle
The lion sleeps tonight.

So there are all sorts of fantastic options, and yes, it is important that we all recognise the fact that we have a voice; our instrument is our body; and we can sing (most of us can sing) and there's also body percussions (we can play rhythms), and then there are other instruments which can be [TAPPING boomwackers] plastic cylinders, which, I think, is heaven – absolute heaven. They're not hard to play and they absolutely add atmosphere. We were talking about ukuleles, which are also quite reasonably accessible instruments for young children to play (children of any age), the xylophones (they're quite large, the keys are quite large) notes are well identified. We can get into more sophisticated instruments but it can be very much a graded thing.

Carly Boreland:
Listen, I wanted to ask you about instruments and I thought we could group this together because you were talking about how it's important that the students always have the music whenever they're singing; and you kind of said it like "Oh yeah, it's just important that that happens." But can we talk about that? My understanding and the way I think about this, and everything to do with school, is that whatever we're doing with the students, it needs to be the highest quality experience that we can provide. And I thought, so, "They always have the music because that's what someone in a choir does."

Graham Sattler:
Yes, great. So it's really that they always have the music and not just the words until the point (if they're singing) that they do it without the music at all, because they're so utterly secure. And then what gets added is this absolute connection with the audience where they're really performing it and there doesn't really need to be an intermediary thing with the music. So, that's the deal.

Carly Boreland:
So, the skill is the performance skill, on top (of the music reading skills).

Graham Sattler:
The performance skill but with *no doubt* about what it is their doing; so, there's (in terms of the quality of experience) no compromise or guessing going on, so it's not in any way "second rate" or a compromised experience.

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Carly Boreland:
And so teaching music reading skills, teaching playing musical instruments is just like all other teaching. We keep it lofty for everyone and we add in the steps to help people get there – we don't take things away from students, we give *everybody* the highest possible experience and then we just add in the steps we need.

Graham Sattler:
That's exactly right! And then we are understanding and appreciative of the reality that individuals will become comfortable, confident, competent, develop their skills at the rate of which they're able, rather than (and certainly not being) impeded by a lack of input, a lack of information, a lack of resources. And a wonderful thing about music (it's not exclusive to music but it is a wonderful thing about music) is that there is so many marvellous elements to the experience. With some of those elements the progress will be quicker, with other elements it won't be so quick, but the experience just grows and grows and grows, and as all of those elements come together over the period of time (at whatever rate is relevant for the individual) the opportunity is there to excel with every single element of the experience, given that they're outfitted with the best possible quality experience and opportunities, which is what we all deserve.

I think that everyone has the right to make music, and to make their own music, and that might be music that they create themselves or it might be music they choose themselves, it might be music that they choose as a groups, but it is an incredibly important thing that they do. And again coming back to reading music, it's important that the experience is a quality experience. This is very important for children, and I know that teachers get passionate about this.

One of the reasons that I pretty well insist with groups in schools, as well as other groups using music, and if we're talking about singing, I know a lot of people will have children read from just the word sheets (as we just touched on a little bit earlier), the problem with that is that there's nothing to indicate rhythm or pitch if we're just looking at words. If the letters of some of the chords are above some of the syllables, we might know when to add the guitar or the ukulele or the boomwhacker chord, but it doesn't give us all the information we need so that we know that what we are doing is the highest quality version we possibly could, and I think that everyone deserves the opportunity, and has the right to have the highest quality experience. That's why I think a choral group for instance, or a singing group, while we're rehearsing, while we're learning, while we're really becoming confident with a song, we should be using the sheet music with the words, not just the word sheet; and then when we put the music aside for performance, if that's what we do, we know we're absolutely confident, and then that performance skill is the one that kicks in – without anything between us, as the performer, and the audience; we don't necessarily have to be looking at music.

In an instrumental ensemble, that's a different thing. We would be using the music, usually, all the way through because the requirements of a band or an orchestra with many more individual parts is structurally likely to be much more complex, And so that every member of that ensemble, again, has

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the opportunity to recreate and express with the highest possible quality in the experience; that's why we use music all the way through the experience.

Carly Boreland:
And Graham, can we chat quickly about resources as well because I know people who are going to want a bit on this. So, there's a whole bunch of good things you can use. Obviously there are instruments, and I'm interested to know from you, what are some of the kit; what's the kit you would suggest that teachers get?

Graham Sattler:
Great. So in a classroom, it's fantastic to have an assortment of percussion instruments because they either accompany or add to, or are in a great way into the rhythmic element, and they will add to any musical experience. They tend to be robust and they tend to be inexpensive. Xylophones are fantastic – some people refer to them as an Orff xylophone (Carl Orff being a composer who developed a music education system and relied, to a large degree, on these for improvisation and for creativity in the classroom) – so the wooden xylophones that will either be existent or are available to, they're fantastic. Also, playing them, they're quite big gestures, as I said before, the names of the notes are written on the keys; in terms of spatial awareness, in terms of understanding going from low to high and everything in between, [it's] fantastic.

Ukuleles are good in the classroom and tend to be better than guitars. They're good because they're a chordal instrument so you hear harmonies [PLAYS UKULELE] immediately, so you're setting up tonal environments [PLAYING STOPS], which is fantastic, and you can sing, as well as play them. They tend to be better than guitars for small hands for fairly obvious reasons; [there are] only four strings, the neck is much narrower (much smaller than guitars), the whole instrument is much smaller and much more handle-able, and that's fantastic. It's great to have some other keyboards – the xylophone is a keyboard instrument but it's great to have some other keyboard as well, like electric piano-type keyboards (that can be fairly inexpensive); so, in the classroom, those sorts of instruments. Again boomwhackers are fantastic – they're inexpensive, they're easy to play, the musical results are instantaneous.

The "physicality" of playing an instrument, (larger, kind of physical actions) are great for development anyway – neurological development. The other thing about music is that when we play music or make music, the movement centres in the brain are also activated and so there's a real connection between making music and moving, and of course, making music and *being* moved; there is no some sort of "freakish" use of the same word for two different reasons – we *are moved* and we *do move* when we are making music. So, that's the thing about ukuleles, xylophones, boomwhackers, percussion instruments, large physical movements, which are pretty good.

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Carly Boreland:
And so because of that quite literal *physical* effect, as well as the *educative* effects, we want *one* instrument per person.

Graham Sattler:
We *do* want one instrument per person

Carly Boreland:
We don't want *one* keyboard per person…

Graham Sattler:
No, we don't, but we *need one* instrument. And the thing is all of those instruments can be mixed together, can be combined, to make a band, a classroom ensemble.

Carly Boreland:
And I suppose we should also think about the way we sometimes distribute instruments in class. We don't want one kid who is always the boomwhacker child…

Graham Sattler:
[Laughing] No, no, we don't; that's right..."Boomer" way at the back of the class…

Carly Boreland:
…we need a variety of experiences.

Graham Sattler:
No, no, that's exactly right – variety of musical experiences because they do take different types of physical actions and skills, I suppose, to play and to make. And that's also why singing, as a consistent element in music making is really important. We really don't want children to develop a reticence, if you like, to not want to sing, to not have their voice heard. We've spoken about this before, it's important for people to feel that they can have their voices heard and that what they're doing in acceptable. But that's exactly right; spreading them around but for every child to be contributing and participating. And then having the capability to then make, or offer a child, something a little more complicated as the next step, always satisfying the inquisitiveness, but also as children's abilities develop, it's great to be able to feed that [by] having that variety of instruments.

Schools have the ability, the capacity, to purchase and to maintain resources. I know that sometimes it can be difficult sometimes for schools and with school budgets but these sort of resources are just as important as any other physical resources required for learning. The benefits, by far, outweigh the cost of the resources. And of course, maintaining them is an important thing, but the instruments we have talked about so far (given a reasonable level of care shown towards them), they're pretty robust.

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Carly Boreland:
And can we talk to you about song choice?

Graham Sattler:
Yeah!

Carly Boreland:
Because I know that there are some songs you can choose that are going to bring out whatever it is you're trying to.

Graham Sattler:
That's true. There are great sources for good repertoire. When we're talking about songs, the thing to really consider is the *range* of the notes; that none of the notes are too high or too low to be comfortable for young voices. And, if we were to look at a stave, basically, in the treble stave, which is what most music for children's voices will be written in (the one that has the clef at the beginning that looks a bit like a G; the treble clef/G clef), anything from A, which is just below (I know it's hard to not use note names in this context), basically an octave or A below the stave, up to C in the third space in the treble [stave], that sort of range will usually be very safe. We have to be very caring that the concepts are not overtly adult concepts that the children are singing about. We also need to have songs that the teacher can sing, can demonstrate, and that aren't so complex that the children can't sing them back and know that they're right. So they have to be singable by the teacher and they have to be teachable which means that the kids will also know when they're right. So, they can't be so complex or adult-like that the kids don't know when they're singing it correctly – that's a really, really, really, really key thing.

There are quite a few resources including The Arts Unit that do have collections of songs that are sound, that are teachable, that are in the right register, that don't deal with concepts that are really inappropriate for primary school children.

Carly Boreland:
I noticed a lot of times, when you're leading a group, you always ask first "Is there anyone who doesn't know this song?"

Graham Sattler:
Yes, that's true, that's true.

Carly Boreland:
And I can see how that because we don't want to make a cultural assumption about our students…

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Graham Sattler:
That's exactly right…

Carly Boreland:
…and they're only going to be on board if they do know the song. I guess they are easy fixes to that, like you just sing it to them.

Graham Sattler:
It's just great to know the starting point. If it's a song that's super familiar, it may be difficult to teach because they may know a version that is a bit peculiar or was sung by somebody for a particular purpose that may have been in a crazy or difficult key, or something like that, so it's great to assess what they do know of the song.

If they're familiar with a song then you don't have to spend too much time on making sure that the tune is correct, or that sort of thing, but the other thing is "cultural assumption"; it's really important to steer clear of those. It might appear like people (from everything that you can see and the conversations that you have with people) may know something, but that may not be the case. It's always good to know where the group stands; what the starting point is, really. But it is also (you will have also probably noticed when you've seen me teaching songs to groups) that teaching them in identifiable little chunks, so you know when you get to the end of a chunk (which might be half a chorus, it might be a line, it might be a whole chorus), but you know that they're going to remember what you've just done so then you can go over it a few times, and it's cohesive enough for them to be learning it in chunks. So choosing repertoires, it has to be singable and you, as a teacher, need to know how to sing it, and you need to be able to make it clear so that they can reproduce it clearly.
There are lots of sources, and of course, the Centre for Professional Learning has a developing library of resources, and some of those are physical, some of those resources are access to consultants like me, for instance, where I can suggest particular things if people are interested. So there is a way to certainly find resources that are likely to be appropriate. And the same goes with instrumental music, for sure. There are many publishers who deal in classroom appropriate ensemble music and we can certainly put people in touch with those resources.

Again, going back to what you said about a "quality experience", that is critical. And for teachers to feel *confident* in engaging the kids in a quality experience, that is very, very, very much a part of it.

Carly Boreland:
Graham, we've had a really nice time chatting with you, and in this episode, we have to thank a lot of people…

Graham Sattler:
We do…

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Carly Boreland:
…for making this one possible. Some of those people are going to sing us out of this particular episode and they are the teachers who are a part of our course and our wonderful public education system. We also need to thank Jason Nicholas because he comes up with these great ideas and does all of the hard work…

Graham Sattler:
Champion. He does! We just sit around and natter!

Carly Boreland:
[Giggles]…to get new ideas like this one recorded. And Graham, of course, thank you for your insights today and explaining to us why teaching music is possible, why students can learn to read music, and why their teachers can enjoy that experience themselves and create a really great and high quality experience for their students.

Graham Sattler:
Thank you, Carly.

Carly Boreland:
You've been listening to the JPL podcast for the NSW Teachers Federation, Centre for Professional Learning. I'm Carly Boreland. I've been speaking with Graham Sattler about teaching music reading skills to students in primary schools, and to find out more and to listen to further podcasts, you can visit our website at cpl.asn.au/podcast

[RECORDING PLAYS]

PIANO MUSIC & GROUP SINGING IN ROUNDS:

…
When to sleep and when to grow

Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring
Round and round and round again

Seasons come and seasons go
Bring the sunshine, rain and snow

Tell the trees to change their leaves
When to sleep and when to grow

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Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring
Round and round and round again

Seasons come and seasons go
Bring the sunshine, rain and snow…#

[RECORDING FADES INTO BACKGROUND]

CONCLUSION:
The JPL Podcast is produced by the Centre for Professional Learning and the New South Wales Teachers' Federation. All opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the individual speakers only, and do not necessarily represent the views of their employer or associated organisations. The host was Carly Boreland, technical direction by Jason Nicholas.

[RECORDING ENDS]

Dr. Graham Sattler **has extensive music teaching experience in primary, secondary and adult education settings. He has been involved in course design and delivery around concepts and strategies for both pre-service and existing teachers, writing and delivering K-6 Music courses in partnership with the NSWTF CPL since 2014, and is committed to the principles of access and equity and student-focused learning experiences. Graham presents regularly at international music education conferences, drawing on his PhD research into socio-cultural development through group music activity in marginalised communities.**