

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES,
PROGRAMS & PLANNING

Music fosters critical skill development

Galina Zenin, Music and Early Childhood Consultant and Program Director, Bonkers Beat® Music Kinder, is passionate about music in early childhood education. *Belonging Early Years Journal* caught up with her to find out how a holistic focus on music can improve children's overall wellbeing and build critical skills for life.

Belonging Early Years Journal (B): What are the most critical skills children need to succeed and thrive in the 21st century?

Galina Zenin (GZ): The world is changing rapidly, and how we teach now needs to be different to how we taught in the past 20–30 years. Because technology and the modern world are evolving so fast, we need to focus on skills that will help children to thrive and blossom not only when they go to school, but also when

they enter adulthood. These skills are critical thinking, teamwork, cooperation, communication, creativity, resilience, confidence and leadership. These skills are essential; regardless of what is happening in the world, children with these skills will be emotionally and socially strong.

B: How can music enhance these crucial skills for children?

GZ: It's better to play music in the background than not at all, but if we want to foster all of those skills, we need to look at high-quality music programs that can enhance all those areas. If the music contains age-appropriate messages, it will not only help children with learning languages, but it will help educators to bring a strong focus to their curriculum. Music experiences need to be structured. These critical skills can be enhanced, but only with a high-quality music program, not just with background music alone.

For example, with the experience of playing a drum, I suggest to pass just one instrument around the circle, so that children learn to be patient, collaborate and control their emotions. If we give instruments to all the children, they won't develop these skills.

B: What are the additional expectations of the revised National Quality Standards (NQS), and what is the role of creative arts, including music, in meeting these?

GZ: Because the world is changing and the children who we are teaching today will be creating this world, some of the most important skills are imagination and creativity. If we don't have arts as part of our curriculum, we won't be able to help children to develop these skills. I am a classically trained musician and I know how arts can positively change children's behaviour, as well as their personalities. It can change their desire for learning and help them to express

themselves. I have been teaching for 38 years, and know how children have developed crucial skills by being introduced to music, drama and art. It helps them build a strong personality.

The NQS has a growing focus on music. Assessors want to see more music programs, but our educators are not trained to bring more music. Performing arts support and reflect the NQS, and hopefully, as we develop the NQS, there will be more focus on, and support for, music and performing arts.

B: Why music?

GZ: I don't think people realise the power of music on the neuroplasticity of the brain, and the science behind music. By listening, playing and engaging in musical experiences, children's brains can be rewired. It changes the structure of the brain in a positive way. Music has an enormous impact on IQ, social and emotional skills, wellbeing, creativity, and gross and fine motor skills, as well as traits like resilience.

Funded training – take advantage of the savings

Federal and state government departments regularly offer funded training opportunities that services can use to employ new staff or upskill existing staff. Currently there is funding available in New South Wales and Queensland for a range of early childhood and school-age education and care qualifications. For example, the Queensland Government's Department of Employment, Small Business and Training is currently offering the CHC50113 Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care via the Higher Level Skills Program, which is ideal for educators who wish to upgrade their qualifications or for people who want to commence a career in the early childhood sector. Normally delivered via distance education (fee for service), this course would cost \$5265 – under the Higher Level Skills Program, the non-concessional fee is \$1330. •

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B: What is the importance of musical and wellbeing experiences for brain development and the overall wellbeing of children?

GZ: Music is a crucial wellbeing experience. When we experience music, we are expressing ourselves and our emotions. But we also do yoga, mindfulness, laughter sessions, reflexology, 'catching the energy of the sun', releasing emotions and bonding exercises. We have a huge range of wellbeing techniques, and every one of them helps kids to express themselves and improve wellbeing. When people can't release emotions, their mental health will be affected.

A huge part of our wellbeing experiences is saying positive thoughts out loud on a daily basis. People need to think of music as one effective wellbeing strategy. We are now more focused on children's wellbeing and music as a way to improve their mental health.

B: How much training do educators need to support children with developing these skills?

GZ: We need to ask the questions, 'Are we providing training to our educators to actually teach these skills? Are we training and equipping our educators with the skills to confidently run wellbeing programs?' I don't see that happening very often, so what we do at Bonkers Beat is provide all of this training. We train members to run music confidently on a daily basis. We provide

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training for yoga and mindfulness, and the biggest benefit to educators is that they are improving their personal skills and their own mental wellbeing.

Educators engaging in wellbeing programs are also releasing emotions and benefiting from these exercises. One of my priorities is to focus on educators, and enhance their mental health and wellbeing. They are incredible role models for children because they are working with them every day. They have a bigger impact on children's development than someone coming once a week to run programs.

At Bonkers Beat, we provide comprehensive musical wellbeing training for educators and support them throughout the year. Educators can really build their confidence, and deepen their understanding and knowledge about music and wellbeing, incorporating these skills on a daily basis with all children. On top of this, we offer weekly support, and all educators have online access to every experience so they can learn it again and again until they feel confident. People can't build confidence in just one workshop, especially if they don't have a music background.

Daily embedded practices provide consistency so that there are greater outcomes for children.

Bonkers Beat provides all the support needed. Our music program has recently been approved for school-readiness funding, and our kinder has received an Excellent rating due to our outstanding music and wellbeing practices. We love to support services in bringing a holistic approach to music in their centres. It's a proven program, as we are at full occupancy, and have a waiting list of two years.

Music and wellbeing is holistic; it's not just a one-off session. Children express and learn through 100 languages, and music is one of them. If we start using music as a language daily through the curriculum, we can help children to develop crucial skills and prepare them for a bright future! 🐦