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ARTICLE

Music across the waves: an international comparative examination of the Irish generalist and the American specialist models of music education from the teacher's perspective

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Abstract

The structure, implementation and operation of music education at the primary level differs depending on the legislation of the education system within which the school operates. An inquiry-based project was completed over a 10-week period, with the overall aim of gaining an understanding of current teacher practice within music education in both Ireland and the United States. This article examines the Irish generalist and the American specialist models of music education from the teacher's perspective. The overarching question guiding this research was 'How is music education realised in Irish and American schools at the primary/elementary level?'. The project sought to investigate the specific challenges of both the generalist and specialist models to ascertain if one educational context might inform the other. Teacher surveys, teacher interviews, curriculum artefacts, expert interviews and contemporary literature around the topic were utilised as data sources to assimilate music educators' perceived experiences of implementing their respective music curricula. Drawing from the data gathered, coded and quantitively and qualitatively analysed, two contrasting vignette-style stories are presented. A brief discussion follows that compares both models, highlighting some of their relative advantages and drawbacks.

Keywords: Generalist; specialist; models of music education; curriculum; teacher training

Introduction

The provision and implementation of music education differs from country to country and depends on a host of interrelated factors, including funding, resources, time allocation, school priorities and policies and teacher training (Spohn, 2008). In Ireland, music education at the primary level typically follows the generalist model. Generalist music education refers to music as it is taught by the classroom teacher who is also responsible for teaching several other subjects during the school day. Music is typically integrated into other content areas at the discretion of the generalist teacher. Contrasting this model is the specialist model of music education. In this model, students usually go to specifically trained music teachers for an allotted period of time each week in which the sole focus is on music as a content area (Marsh, 2012). Such practices are common in public elementary schools across the United States.

This study investigates the experiences, beliefs, challenges and values of music teachers at the elementary/primary level and offers a timely enquiry into the contrasting specialist and generalist models. In Ireland, this comes at a time when there are considerable changes to the educative landscape at secondary level for music education. Such reforms are seeing a shift from formative, teacher-led approaches to an introduction of non-formal and student-centred pedagogies and methodologies. These changes will, in turn, inevitably impact how music education is perceived,

delivered and experienced at the primary level. It is therefore an opportune time to assimilate the experiences and voices of teachers in primary classrooms and critically examine possibilities to enhance the delivery of music to students within the Irish context. Thus, the question underpinning this study emerges as follows: 'How is music education realised in Irish and American schools at the primary/elementary level?'

Rationale and guiding questions of the study

Following an investigation of current literature in the field, it appears that there is no study that comparatively analyses the Irish generalist and American specialist models of music education at the primary/elementary level. Consequently, this study offers an original contribution to the field.

In conducting a study of this nature, the researcher was in a unique position of studying in the United States while coming from a primary teaching background in Ireland. Consequently, this inquiry was conducted with the intention to ascertain if the specialist model of music education could inform the generalist model in any way. The guiding questions underpinning the inquiry were as follows:

- What is the current state of music education in Irish primary schools?
- What is the current state of music education in U.S. public elementary schools?
- What does the pre-service training/initial teacher education (ITE) of specialist and generalist music education teachers look like in Irish and U.S. education systems?
- What are some of the challenges and difficulties specialist and generalist music education teachers face in implementing their respective music curricula?
- How can the generalist teacher be supported in teaching the musical strands of listening and responding, composing and performing?

Literature review

Numerous authors have discussed the benefits of an engagement with music and the arts for children (Eisner, 2002; Mannes, 2011; Sacks, 2007; Odegaard, 2016; Vitale, 2011). However, in order for such music programmes to reap the most benefit for the child, quality is one of the essential factors (Jellison, 2004).

Defining 'generalist' and 'specialist'

In order to explore the research topic in detail, one needs to develop a common definition of the terms of the research question; the term 'generalist' for the purposes of this research project refers to those teachers who have responsibility for all content areas of the primary/elementary curriculum. The teacher is tasked with the job of teaching music as a subject itself to children in conjunction with a host of other subjects throughout the school day. They may also integrate music into other content areas as they see fit. Conversely, the term 'specialist' (as it applies to music specialist teachers) is defined as someone who has extensive training and skills in music (Marsh, 2012, p. 318) and who takes different classes throughout the school for a set time each week specifically devoted to the teaching of music.

Music education in the Irish Context

In Ireland, the generalist primary school teacher covers 12 discrete curricular areas – English, Gaeilge (Irish language), mathematics, history, geography, science, physical education, social, personal and health education, religious education (according to the ethos of the school's patron

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body), visual art, drama and music. Over the course of their teaching career, the generalist teacher has the potential to amass over 1,100 discrete teaching hours of music in the Irish primary classroom. Children attend primary school for 8 years from junior infants (age 4) up until 6th class (age 12). According to the Department of Education's Circular Letter 0056/11 (2011), children in junior and senior infant classes are to receive 50 min of music education per week. This increases to one full hour per week of music education for the rest of the primary school (1st class to 6th class).

This means that during a child's eight primary schooling years, they are exposed to over 246 hours of music education. In this time, they are meant to have received education across the three strands of the National Primary Music Curriculum (1999): listening and responding, composing and performing. The curriculum follows a spiral design, whereby the child builds on learning each year from the previous year, returning to the same topics in increasing amounts of detail. Overarching all of these strands are the musical elements: pulse, rhythm, pitch, timbre, dynamics, duration, tempo, structure and style which the child needs to develop an awareness of and facility of use with.

The specialist music teaching model

The notion of specialist teachers of music is not common within the traditional Irish primary school system. By contrast, this is the United States' most used teaching model for music education (Give a Note Foundation, 2017).

The educative landscape with regard to music education in the United States is complex. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 diverted attention away from music and the arts, resulting in a decline in the instructional time for the arts. Despite this however, of all of the creative arts disciplines, music is the most universally available in U.S. public elementary schools, with 94% reporting instruction in music (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, p. 5). Again, this information is mirrored in a study of school principals' perceptions of music education by Abril and Gault (2006). Here, 93% of principals reported that music education was a required component of the elementary school curriculum and 95% claimed that a music specialist was employed in their school (p. 18). A music specialist may cover any of the areas of the music curriculum as follows: general music, chorus, band, orchestra, ensemble, technology, etc. At the elementary level, however, the music specialist is more likely to teach across several of these areas (Give a Note Foundation, 2017, p. 2).

Methodology

The inquiry-based project was completed to gain a deeper understanding of both models of music education as they operate in Ireland and the United States. Teacher surveys, teacher interviews, curriculum documentation, music education expert interviews as well as contemporary literature based on the topic were gathered from both the Irish and American perspectives over a period of 10 weeks. A total of 91 surveys were completed to gather initial impressions and voices of teachers in the field (70 Irish generalist teachers and 21 American specialist teachers from the upper east coast). Irish teacher surveys were distributed with the assistance of a teacher support network, predominantly catering for the south-west region of Ireland. Teachers were individually contacted and asked to complete the online survey. An overall response rate of 82% (70 out of 85) was achieved for Irish teachers completing the survey. American teacher surveys were distributed using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling methods with the assistance of an upper east coast university that offers music specialist teacher training. Specialist teachers who work with the university regularly were contacted and asked to complete the survey and, where possible, distribute the survey to fellow colleagues. Using these methods, 21 specialist music teachers responded to the online survey.

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Following from the initial teacher surveys, a total of 5 teacher interviews (3 from south-west Ireland and 2 from the upper east coast of America) were conducted to glean more qualitative data and look in more depth at some of the interesting points emerging from the survey data. All interviewees had completed the initial survey prior to engaging with the interviewer. Irish interviewees were chosen based on their own perceived levels of 'musicality' according to the survey. One participant regarded themselves as having 'limited musicality'. Another thought of themselves as 'reasonably musical' while the third considered themselves as 'having strong musical ability'. Interviewees were chosen in this stratified manner to obtain the insights from the broadest possible spectrum of teachers. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher the scope to delve into points of interest as they emerged naturally from the interview. Interviews lasted typically between 25 and 55 minutes with questions drawn from the preliminary findings of the survey data.

Following from an initial analysis of the data, themes were generated that emanated from the interview transcripts. These themes centred around previous musical experience, classroom experiences, ITE and teaching experience. Codes were assigned to these themes, such as positive or negative attributions. Transcripts were then coded according to these themes and were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed.

Complimenting the survey and interview data, the respective national curriculum framework documents for music education were synoptically compared and analysed in order to determine if there were any considerable differences in curricular standards and objectives for music. Two music education professors from teacher training colleges in Ireland and the United States were interviewed to add another layer of authenticity to the project. Data emerging from the surveys, interviews and curricular documentation were then analysed, coded, triangulated and condensed into two vignette-style stories that depict the Irish generalist and the American specialist perspectives of music education. These stories are in no way definitive but offer a brief and accessible glimpse and insight into some of the common thinking, challenges, experiences, successes, themes and practices among music educators internationally.

Findings

To capture the teacher voice in the research, the findings take the form of two vignettes. Each vignette paints the picture of the generalist and specialist models of music education as they exist in Ireland and the United States, respectively. The vignettes presented examine the impact of the following on music provision as it exists within both models:

- pre-service teacher training/ITE
- the curriculum
- beliefs and values regarding music education
- thoughts on the purposes of music education
- personal music activity
- challenges to music education

A vignette of the Irish generalist music teacher

In Ireland, the generalist class teacher is usually the individual who teaches music at the primary level. Visiting music specialists may sometimes visit schools on a voluntary basis or if the school is willing to provide the necessary funds. In this way, the quality of music education in schools in Ireland relies on the ability of the class teacher or the funding and attention given by the school to music and the arts. Ryan (2001) observes that 'provision is not universal but is haphazardly dependent on local circumstances and on the enthusiasm and skills of particular teachers' (Preamble section, para. 9).

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Curriculum

The primary school curriculum firmly attests to the centrality of music for the development of the child: 'children of all ages and abilities have potential in music, and music education celebrates individual differences among them' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment of Ireland, 1999, p. 5). Generalist teachers use the Primary Music Curriculum and Primary Music Curriculum: Teacher Guidelines books, published by the NCCA in 1999 for their planning. These set out the mandated standards, aims and objectives for each class level from junior infants (age 4) to 6th class (aged 12). The music curriculum is broken down into three distinct areas, called strands: performing, composing and listening and responding. Within these areas, there are further sub-sections, known as strand units, which identify elements of music such as musical literacy, exploring sounds and using instruments. Overarching all of these strands are musical elements that children should experience and have some familiarity with. The layout of the curriculum is not overly prescriptive and is flexible enough to be manipulated to the teacher's needs. Irish teachers who were surveyed confirmed the nature of the curriculum in their descriptions: 'It kind of tells you what to pinpoint in your music lessons but it doesn't give you specific lessons to teach or it doesn't give you ideas on how to teach those elements that it has in the curriculum' (Participant 1); 'To be honest, when I create a music lesson, I kind of come up with a lesson first- . . . then go into the curriculum to see what objectives match my lesson' (Participant 2).

This flexibility can often result in lack of clarity among teachers and schools, culminating in discontinuity in musical experiences for children:

> '. . . the lack of a systematic music education in the primary school is having a serious negative impact on the life of the individual and on society as a whole. This deprivation is being felt throughout all sectors and genres of music-making in Ireland and unfortunately it creates a circular problem, whereby the value of music is not understood because it has not been experienced'. (Ryan, 2001, Recommendations from the Forum for Music in Ireland section, para. 2).

Indeed, some teachers felt that the lack of a specific structure makes it hard to pitch lessons at a suitable level for students' abilities and needs: '[I would like] separate books for the three strands so the level of each can be selected independently based on the ability of the class' (survey respondent). In relation to structuring a music programme, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) attest that:

> 'a music education programme, like any other, should consist of sequentially organised learning experiences that lead to clearly defined skills and knowledge. The ultimate goal of music education is not great student performances, but musical learning that will allow young people to actively participate in their musical cultures for their entire lives'. (2009, p. 11)

However, the policies and procedures for music education provision and planning are highly idiosyncratic to schools, based on their resources and needs. For example, composing was one element of the curriculum that was largely under-represented and avoided by teachers who often reported that it was an area they were lacking confidence and competence in teaching. This will be discussed later in the article.

Pre-service training in music

With regards to pre-service training in music, the influence of ITE is significant in shaping a generalist teacher's identity as a music teacher: 'participatory arts experiences and reflective approaches to teaching and learning the arts are fundamental to informing emergent teacher identities' (Kenny, Finneran, & Mitchell, 2015, p. 166). This insight is reflected in the surveys

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distributed to teachers: 'Before pre-service training, I assumed that music was all about singing!' (Participant 1); 'Luckily throughout my time in college, music education taught me how to differentiate music, express and explain musical terminology, structure music lessons for all class levels and lastly how to incorporate and integrate music across curricular areas' (Participant 2).

Irish teachers generally receive specific training in the teaching of music and the arts, albeit placed within the larger context of their teaching posts. As set out by the Teaching Council of Ireland's ITE: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (2017), a maximum of 20% of the program content for teacher training programmes is at the discretion of the programme provider and so, the time that can be afforded to education in music during ITE is limited. Cutietta (2007) notes the unique and subject-specific challenges of creating quality music educators: 'music education is a unique discipline in higher education. First, we must develop a knowledge base and two separate skill sets: that of a musician and a teacher' (p. 13). The dual required components of musicianship and proficient music educational methodologies generate myriad difficulties for teachers, particularly those with a limited range of prior musical experiences.

Attitudes and perceptions

While ITE forms a critical component of developing effective music educators, a larger issue concerns the attitudinal, value and belief systems teachers hold for the area of music. Indeed, 'the way that teachers perceive themselves in regard to their low artistic abilities connects directly to the level of effectiveness they demonstrate as arts teachers' (Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009, p. 23). In a recent study of primary student teachers in Ireland, Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell discovered that '[student teachers] appeared to be relying on pre-existing belief systems prior to the module experience to inform their emerging values of arts education' (2015, p. 165) and that '[student teachers] with strong pre-existing arts identities found that teaching the arts demanded different skill sets and sets of understandings not previously encountered' (p. 163). From an Australian standpoint, Garvis notes that 'while the majority of teachers suggested that the arts were important for children, they did not have time or the mastery experience to teach the arts' (2012, p. 164). All of these authors raise the argument that there is a certain correlation between a teacher's personal prior musical experience and their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching it. One survey respondent expressed their concerns about this correlation and the resulting impact on students' exposure to music: 'some teachers think that they know nothing about music so they just sing songs all of the time'.

Personal musical activity

Primary school teachers often have taken part or still take part in musical activities, many of which are pursued in private settings, external to the school environment. Bar charts were generated from the survey data below, indicating how many teachers have engaged in and still engage in music-related activities in their lives. It would appear that many teachers took classes in music in the past, with a small proportion still engaged in these classes. There is an interestingly significant increase in the number of teachers who stated that they play an instrument now as opposed to in the past (Figure 1).

In schools, it seems that there is an implicit expectation that teachers can play an instrument and know how to implement a music curriculum, despite the aforementioned limited teacher training experiences (Figure 2). Two teachers confirmed this expectation as follows:

> '*There's a lot of schools there that don't have teachers who are proficient in reading music and they don't have teachers who can play musical instruments, yet we are still expected to teach tin whistle [an Irish instrument similar to a recorder] and teach children how to read music*' (Participant 1).

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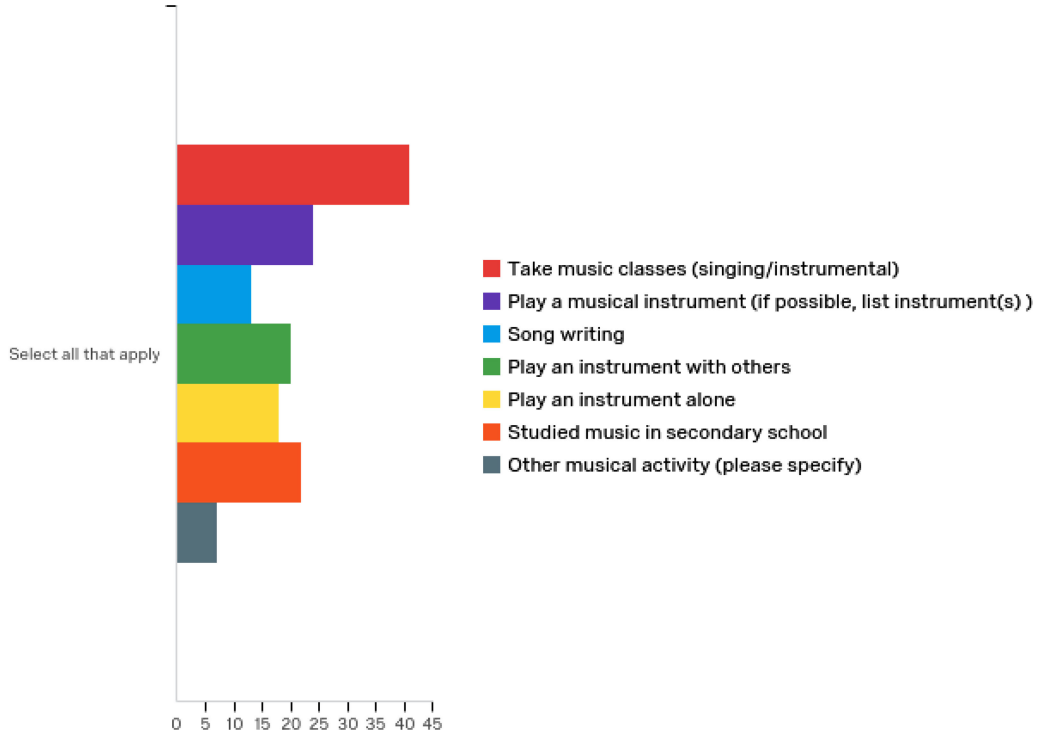

Figure 1. Musical activities that Irish teachers have engaged in the past.

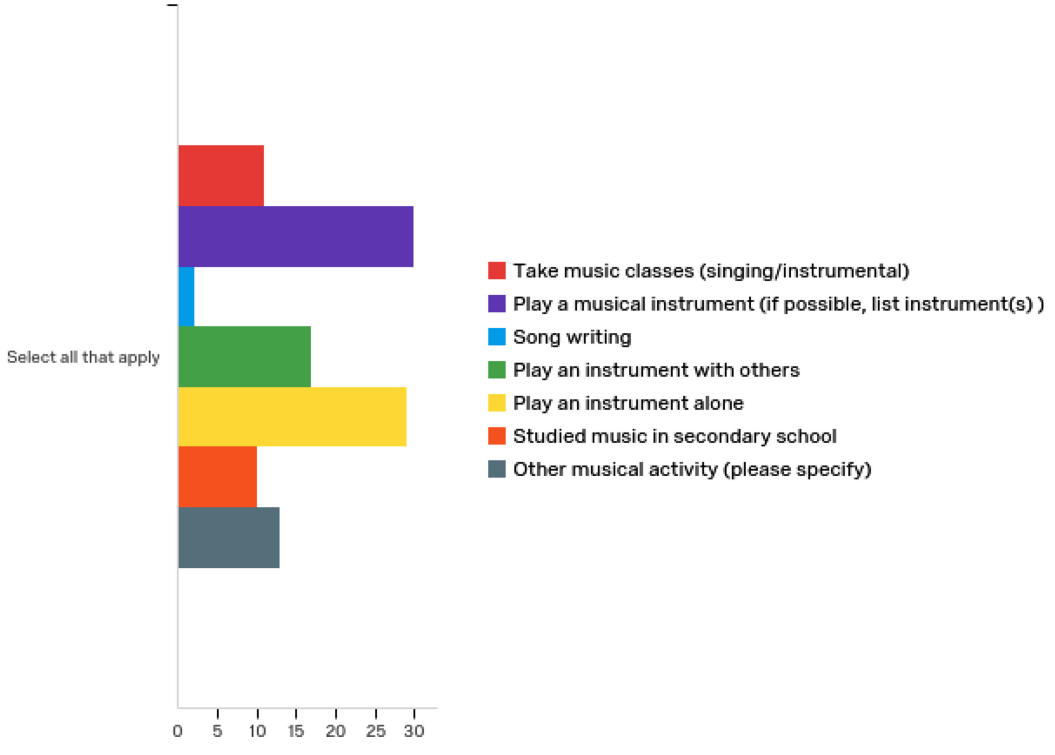

Figure 2. Musical activities that Irish teachers engage in currently.

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'. . . *it was only when I finished college that I was talking to different teachers and they mentioned things like they may not understand how to read music or you know, there was a teacher one day who asked me to explain a crochet, minim, quaver and all that presuming that they would have known that from college. But then I was thinking about it afterwards and the angle they came at it in college was presuming that we knew all of that, so if you didn't have previous musical background, you may have struggled*' (Participant 2).

Purposes of music education

The purposes of music education are viewed by many teachers as being more experiential – that is to say exposing children to music in whatever form is familiar and useful to the teacher at the time. Music is often used as a teaching tool and methodology for other subjects due to its potential for transmediation or '[opening] up other ways of knowing for students to access' (Leland et al., 2012, p. 433). As one teacher noted:

'. . . *if they're able to compose music it relates to English, you know composing a poem or story – they all link together so I think it's a great subject to be able to participate in*' (Participant 3).

In addition to using music as a vehicle to teach other subjects, survey respondents mentioned music being used as a break from more formal subjects, for fun and enjoyment, for school concerts, religious events, shows, assemblies, brain breaks and transitions between lessons:

'*You don't even have to necessarily be musical to participate in music. I think everyone, um, relates to it in a different way. They're, they, um, approach it in a different way so people can't really sing, but they can still relate to what's around them with regards to listening and responding. I think the different areas of music kind of accommodate every type of learner*' (Participant 3).

Certainly, while these are important uses of music, not every child will be exposed to such musical experiences, thereby resulting in an unequal system of music education provision: '. . . when music is taught, it is often used as an 'add-on' to other curricular activities and focuses on preparation for items for schools assemblies and concerts rather than being taught for its own intrinsic value where genuine musical experiences and skills are developed over time . . . ' (DeVries, 2013, p. 376).

Conclusion

The story of the Irish generalist music teacher is an interesting one. Certainly, while there is considerable flexibility with regard to how music is taught by teachers, the quality of music education provision falls largely on the previous musical experience of the teacher and the support of the school. With regard to creating effective music educators, there are many obstacles, including the following: initial and continuing teacher education, prior musical experience, teacher's musical self-efficacy, beliefs about music, attitudes, values and misconceptions about music education – all of which have been identified and discussed. The literature suggests that schools are failing to reach students with meaningful musical experiences, despite teachers' obligation to teach music as a core subject side by side with the other subjects of the curriculum (National Council of Curriculum and Assessment of Ireland, 1999; Ryan, 2001; Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 2009). While there is large disparity and diversity of children's primary school music experiences, the stability of community present in the generalist classroom means that the children are comfortable in exploring music with their teacher, should the teacher choose to explicitly develop their students' musical knowledge, skills and awareness.

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The American specialist music teacher

Specialist music teachers can hold a variety of positions within the public elementary school, from teaching general music to ensemble (band, chorus and orchestra). While general music is the most common offering in elementary school, the position of a specialist teacher depends on the resources and needs of the particular school or district. In this way, the specialist teacher must be equipped to adapt and fit in with their particular teaching context.

Pre-service training in music

The ITE of specialist music teachers must cover a broad range of musical content, knowledge, theory, history, skills, methodologies and pedagogies: 'in most traditional music teacher education programs, four general domains of knowledge are typically addressed as follows: general education; content knowledge; pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge' (Ziechner, Nierman, & Hobbel, 2002, p. 826). The breadth of these domains of knowledge for music specialists is typically covered in undergraduate programmes over four years, subsequently enabling the teacher to teach music from grades K–12 (Cutietta, 2007).

Teachers generally reported that their ITE equipped them effectively to teach music:

> '*The program was very broad, encompassing MANY different facets of music education. The idea behind this, as we were told, was that one could not know what one might possibly be asked to do upon landing that first teaching job. This has been proven true again and again over the course of my career*' (survey respondent).

> '*They cover a lot and it was great. I think that it was the right amount. Especially because when you come out you're certified K to 12 band, orchestra and chorus. So you can do like whatever. So that's why they have to include all of those things which is a little overwhelming at first but you get into it and it's good*' (Participant 4).

Attitudes and perceptions

Despite the extensive training of the music specialist, the position and reputation of music in the elementary school is heavily reliant on the value placed in music education by the principal and other staff members. While in general, school attitudes to music is deemed predominantly positive (Jellison, 2004; Abril & Gault, 2006), there are some negative attitudes towards music teachers. For example, one survey respondent quoted the following: 'we are generally considered a break for the teachers, so our time and schedule problems are not really addressed. We just have to make it happen'. Another survey respondent stated that they did not have their own classroom and had to transport their teaching materials from room to room on a cart. Indeed, Atterbury and Richardson reinforce this nomadic notion: 'music teachers often are perceived as being on the periphery of elementary education because they teach in more than one building and have short amounts of time with each class of children' (1995, p. 11).

Challenges

In their teaching position, the specialist music teacher encounters myriad difficulties. Frequently, time was noted as having a significant impact on what the specialist teacher could cover. Indeed, both interview participants stated that they met with the entire school (600 and 750 students, respectively) on a four-day rotating cycle, meaning that students only receive around 40–50 min of discrete contact time with the music teacher.

Due to the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy arising from the No Child Left Behind Act, funding for music and the arts has reduced considerably (Abril & Gault, 2006, p. 18). In some

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schools, this means that generalist teachers are teaching children music, despite having limited training in the area. Rarely, the generalist teacher teaches music as children get older in the elementary school as it is seen by the generalist teacher to be infringing on the domain of the specialist music teacher: 'in the US, schools are having difficulty finding generalist teachers who can adequately and confidently teach music in their classroom, given the history of specialist teachers previously being trained to teach this subject' (Russel-Bowie, 2009, p. 25).

The ad hoc nature of scheduling arrangements means there is discontinuity and instability of community within the specialist classroom. Consequently, issues of classroom management arise as follows:

> '*. . . we see the kids once a week. So it's, it's difficult to be consistent, like I can be as consistent as I possibly can, but they still only see me once a week. So I think that's a little bit of a challenge, just the lack of time I have with them*' (Participant 5).

This is compounded by the fact that children are outside of their familiar classroom atmosphere and may view music time as an opportunity to behave differently than they would with their general teacher:

> '*. . . the other difficulty is classroom management, especially with those classes that are so large that you know, 2 or 3 kids start to goof off and you're like ok now I've got to take care of you guys and I have 20 plus other kids over here*' (Participant 4).

Resources are identified as another challenge to the implementation of music curricula. The model of funding for public elementary schools allocates resources to schools based on multiple factors on a state-by-state basis (Semuels, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Due to the discretionary nature of funding for public elementary schools, 'there's a huge disparity between suburban schools and city public schools' (Participant 5). As with all teachers, it takes some time for music specialists to develop a reputation within the school before they can request additional resources: 'because I'm just trying to get myself settled in here and I'm at the point now where I can start [going on field trips]. Yeah, funding is definitely a big thing with our program because you've got to buy your instruments, your supplies and things, purchasing music. Luckily, my district is pretty supportive . . . we're lucky here so it's good' (Participant 4).

Additionally, standardised assessment and grading are of considerable concern to the specialist music teacher. Given the cynosure of the standardised-testing environment in contemporary legislature, music has been vastly marginalised and relegated to what can be tested as follows:

> '*With the younger kids . . . we grade them on singing, performing with an instrument and movement. Then, in the older classes, they get singing, performing with an instrument, movement and they get two extra grades*' (Participant 4).

This marginalization comes at a time when, paradoxically, considerable research reveals the benefits of music education in its own right for children (Cutietta, 2007; Sacks, 2007; Flohr, 2010; Mannes, 2011; Odegaard, 2016).

In conjunction with the increased focus on the standardisation of learning, accountability permeates the work of the specialist music teacher. One interview participant noted the targets set for her students through externally generated mandates as follows:

> '*as long as you're meeting the standards – like by the end of 1st grade they should be all able to do steady beat, identify quarter note and eighth note pairs. [And then in] 2nd grade all that, plus they should know sixteenth notes and quarter rests and it builds up from there*' (Participant 4).

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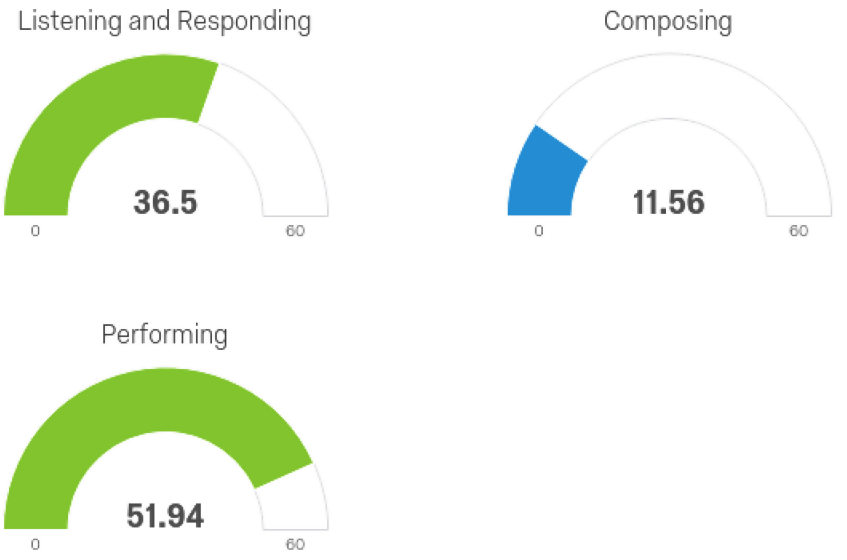

Figure 3. The amount of time (as a percentage) spent on the discrete areas of music by American specialist music teachers.

Curriculum

With regards to curriculum and choice, specialist teachers are obligated to meet the aims and standards set out by their school districts. These standards are often adapted from other school districts' documents and the Common Core Standards for the Arts (2014). The standards are the same for all of the arts areas (dance, media arts, music, theatre and visual arts) and are structured using broad common themes: creating, performing, responding and connecting. The standards themselves offer scope and manoeuvrability for teachers and are open to manipulation based on the needs and interests of the school districts:

> '*I think at one point teachers felt that they had to make sure that they addressed all of those standards and that really again, boils down to the states, I think to the county supervisors and what they're expecting their students to do within their framework*' (Expert Interview Participant 2).

In relation to the components of the music curriculum, the survey data suggest that performing is the focus of much of the work in the elementary music classroom. On the same token, composition is an area that is often neglected. The Common Core Standards do not mention any specific elements of composition, instead they encourage students by the end of the 8th grade to 'use standard and/or iconic notation and/or audio/ video recording to document personal rhythmic phrases, melodic phrases and harmonic sequences [MU:Cr2.1.8b]' (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education, 2014). In addition, survey respondents indicated that they spend significantly less time on composition in comparison to listening, responding and performing (see Figure 3).

Conclusion

The specialist model for elementary music is one that exposes children to some of the highest quality of music education. While highly skilled to teach in a wide range of musical contexts, the music specialist is largely constrained by time, resources, accountability, assessment and the value systems of the school in which the teacher finds themselves. A dichotomous relationship

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emerges between 'administrators' self-reported value for music education and the implementation of these values given current educational realities' (Abril & Gault, 2006, p. 9). This results in the music specialist carefully managing their time and resources in the hope that all the students they teach develop their musicality to some degree.

Thoughts and discussion

Looking at the vignettes painted of the Irish generalist music teacher and the American specialist music teacher, some fascinating insights emerge. The similarities and differences of both systems of music education have much to teach one another regarding best practices in the field.

Beliefs and values of music

It is unsurprising to note that beliefs and values about music education and its place in the school play a pivotal role in the implementation of music curricula. Considerable divergence and variety of beliefs are present regarding music within the primary and elementary school settings. These dichotomous beliefs are manifested according to the position of the staff member within the school/district, their previous musical background and the valency of such beliefs. Indeed, the 'didactic triangle' of student, teacher and content (Johansen, 2007, p. 439) is enormously affected by these belief systems because such attitudinal factors can influence student attitudes and values. If such perspectives and sentiments are of a negative nature, a sort of 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (Expert Interview Participant 1) can ensue for students, whereby their experience of poor music teachers will translate into their negative attitude towards music later in life and even their impaired ability to teach music, should they pursue teaching as a career. DeVries (2013) similarly attests that the 'likelihood of high-self-efficacy in the teaching of music [leads] to future teaching of music' (p. 388). Expert Interview Participant 1 (Irish) captured this idea as follows:

> '*There's sort of a reproduction of values in musical transmission as to what's important and what's less important, and who is musical and who is not. And I think that it is an important part that influences their opinion now about why they think they are either competent or not competent'* (Expert Interview Participant 1 – Irish).

There is a certain set of expectations placed upon the music teacher, be they specialist or generalist to constantly implement quality music education. At the same time, there is often little professional development or training available to teachers within the area of music. A total of 7 out of 13 (54%) of specialist teachers surveyed stated that they felt additional training and workshops within their field would improve and strengthen their teaching of music in the classroom. A total of 26 out of 49 (53%) of generalist teachers held the same belief. Regardless of the model of music education, additional continuous professional development is identified as a factor to providing quality music education and a method of altering the often negative attitudes towards music education in schools.

> *'it boils down to resources [which are] expensive . . . if people don't see the importance of [adequate resources] or understand how that is a part of music teaching and part of what the students should be learning then they might not have access to that. The supervisors or the administrators won't provide it to meet those needs'* (Expert Interview Participant 2 – American).

The attention given to music by teachers, schools and administration can, explicitly and implicitly, demonstrate the value that is placed in music education to students:

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> *'it makes me sad to think about [the lack of prioritisation for music], but for many reasons, that is the case in [America]. I feel like perhaps it'll come back at some point, that it sort of flip flops, and we realise what the students are missing out on by not having full Arts Education'* (Expert Interview Participant 2 – American).

Teacher training in music

As alluded to previously, the teacher training of both specialist and generalist teachers significantly impacts their confidence and perceived competence in delivering the music education curriculum. Jellison (2004) notes that 'the sobering truth is that faculty in teacher preparation programs can have a profound influence on the quality of music education in the schools' (p. 34). It is unsurprising to find that during the critical formational period of teacher training, much of the issues surrounding attitudes, competencies, confidence and musical values come to light. Generalist teachers obviously receive less discrete training in music education in comparison to their specialist counterparts. The breadth and depth of specialist music teacher training undoubtedly serves to develop highly skilled teachers within specific domains of music. Meanwhile, generalist teachers' perceived competence and confidence in teaching music is asynchronous to the training they receive in teaching music. One survey respondent noted in relation to the most influential aspects of their teacher training in music that 'not a lot was beneficial really. I had to use much of what I already knew about music when teaching'. The literature aligns with this finding:

> 'Although the principles of human learning can be taught successfully to prospective teachers and practiced in the course of teacher preparation programs, the disparities between methods course experiences and the real-world pressures of a full-time position in a traditional general music program can send even the best young teachers reeling' (Jellison, 2004, p. 33).

For the generalist teacher during their teacher training, competencies or inadequacies from previous musical experiences are brought sharply into focus and are heightened, exaggerated and exacerbated when they come into contact with fellow teachers in training (Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015). Indeed, this can be the point where the musical fate of many future children is decided as follows:

> *'A bigger assumption underlying [teacher training is] if you can't do it, there must be something wrong . . . sort of an undercurrent of, 'if I can't do that, I can't teach music. If I don't have musical content knowledge we're there just singing songs, I don't really know what to do apart from that'* (Expert Interview Participant 1 – Irish).

Time

With attention centred on the areas of literacy and numeracy with the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in Ireland and the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States, content areas such as music are receiving less and less focus in primary and elementary schools. The universality of time constraints negatively impacts both student and teacher alike: '[music] teachers, while trying to meet the demands of a general curriculum within the strictures of limited time, can become disillusioned. They may lower their expectations, limit performances, avoid assessment of their students and perhaps eventually burn out' (Jellison, 2004, p. 33). Both Irish and American teachers noted that one of the most considerable difficulties in implementing effective music instruction was time; having the time to teach music within a wider curriculum and trying to fit the music curriculum into the limited time available are both obstacles to effective music education.

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Table 1. Time Spent (as a Percentage) on Each Curricular Area of Music Education by Generalist and Specialist Teachers

	Time spent on each curricular area (as a percentage)		
	Listening and responding	Composing	Performing
Irish (generalist) teachers	36.76	16.11	47.13
American (specialist) teachers	36.5	11.56	51.94

When visualising a new curriculum for music education, several survey respondents mentioned having more time for exploration and discussion. Interestingly, because Irish teachers have other subject areas to teach, time allocated to music often gets subsumed and instead is used as a teaching methodology for other subjects rather than a subject in its own right. Indeed, 100% of generalist music teachers surveyed integrate music into other curricular areas in their classrooms. Consequently, music itself as a subject does not receive adequate attention. There is much support in the literature also for this finding; Jellison (2004) notes that 'in an elementary curriculum where instructional time is dispersed across numerous, disconnected activities, there is no time for children's music skills to be refined and no time for a deeper understanding of music' (p. 33). DeVries (2013) similarly states that: 'the questionable quality of music teaching by generalist primary teachers has been identified both at a national and an international level. That is, when music is taught, it is often used as an 'add-on' to other curricular activities and focuses on preparation for items for school assemblies and concerts rather than being taught for its own intrinsic value where genuine musical experiences and skills are developed over time' (p. 376).

Time for the generalist teacher to cover music faces direct competition with the other areas of the curriculum to be covered throughout the school day in an increasingly literacy and numeracy-mandated school system. 'Curriculum overload' was used by Expert Interview Participant 1 to describe this phenomenon. Therefore, teachers who are interested in music themselves and hold higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to teach music as a discrete subject and deliver quality musical experiences to their students. If a teacher does not hold the same value for music, sadly the time children receive in music-specific education can vary considerably in terms of quality and quantity.

As specialist teachers only focus on music, the element of time became more of a concern as regards trying to cover the music curriculum in a pre-specified class period. Ergo, this issue of time affects the music specialist as they are limited to one session in which to cover their curriculum every few days. This has the ripple effect on classroom and behaviour management as the specialist cannot get to know the individual students in the whole school on an individual level like the generalist teacher can. For example, interview Participant 4 stated that they saw 600 students every four days for 50-min sessions. In this time period, they did not have the time to deal with behaviour management issues otherwise they would have difficulties covering the standards and objectives for the day.

In this way, finding time for the generalist teacher to teach music in an overloaded curriculum and using the limited time in the specialist classroom to teach music effectively constitute substantial challenges in both music education models.

Composing

While the musical area of composition is addressed in both Irish and U.S. curricula to some extent (as mentioned earlier), teacher survey data and interviews indicate that composing receives significantly less attention within the music curriculum (see Table 1).

While many teachers surveyed expressed that would like to see additional curriculum supports for the area of composition (71% of generalists and 40% of specialists), much of the onus for the

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inclusion of composition within the music curriculum falls on the ability of the teacher to manipulate curriculum materials to suit their needs as follows:

> *'No one size fits all anyway, you know, in a classroom situation and I don't think it would be the place for the curriculum to be doing that to actually have it so prescriptive because it's limiting the possibilities and limiting the freedom that the teacher has'* (Expert Interview Participant 1 – Irish).

However, this finding may be skewed somewhat as teachers may be including composition indirectly or using an untraditional method as they may view composition as being strictly using staff notation:

> *'. . . maybe to look at [composing] in a different light to not always think of composing as 'I'm actually putting the notes on the paper and making these huge choral or band composition instrumental compositions'. But to think of other ways of putting compositions together. Maybe multimedia and maybe compositions that involve instruments – non-pitched instruments or instruments from around the world or just different ways of putting compositions together'* (Expert Interview Participant 2 – American).

In summary, Expert Interview Participant 2 shares their thoughts on this finding in a concise manner as follows:

> *'I would say percentage-wise it smaller because it takes time. And as we already mentioned, the time factor is a big deal, classes are being cut down the time that you actually see the students and for your students who are going to be doing a presentation or a performance, than most of the time it's going to be spent on practicing for that instead of the general music concepts, like theory and composition and so forth'* (Expert Interview Participant 2 – American).

Conclusion

The Irish generalist and the American specialist models of music education offer two considerably different approaches to the teaching of music. One can attribute a variety of interplaying factors to the perceived advantages or drawbacks of both music education systems, the most pertinent of which have been identified and outlined throughout this article. It is interesting to take a quote from both expert interviewees when asked about their thoughts of the model for music education present in the other country. The American music education professor had this to say about the generalist model of music education:

> *'I always worry about [the generalist model], but if the generalist teacher has had a significant amount of music, which I think – that would be my only concern – is that some of the music concepts that would be taught by the generalist teacher would, maybe not be, um, I don't know what the word would be . . . it's probably just a different way of doing it. If every student would have that full education and [every teacher] be what we would say would 'qualified' to teach music, then I would be fine with it, but I really don't know'* (Expert Interview Participant 2 – American).

When asked their thoughts on the specialist model of music, the Irish music education professor said;

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	Irish Generalist Teacher	American Specialist Teacher
Advantages	• Stability of classroom community for musical expression and development of confidence through a relationship of trust with the teacher • Opportunity for teacher to integrate music throughout the school day • Teacher has considerable element of choice and flexibility in creating, adapting and implementing curriculum in line with their needs and the abilities of their class	• Extensive and comprehensive teacher training and preparation to teach music (content knowledge, methodologies, etc.) • Students receive discrete music education, free from influence from other areas of the curriculum • Students experience developmental and rigorous experiences according to their grade level
Disadvantages	• Limited teacher training with regard to teaching music (content knowledge, methodologies, etc.) • Trying to fit music into an overcrowded curriculum often results in a relative absence of discrete music time • Exposure of students to music education highly dependent on the values, beliefs, competencies, confidence and prior musical knowledge and background of the teacher	• Classroom management/behavioural issues arising from limited relationship between teacher and student • Student contact and engagement time in music is limited to a short session every few days • Students are not afforded the opportunity to experience music as an integrated body of knowledge with other areas of the curriculum • Teacher has limited choice and flexibility in curriculum selection and implementation and is subject to accountability and standardised testing across districts

Figure 4. Advantages and disadvantages of both music education models.

> *'I was always of the opinion – to a certain extent I still am – that the generalist classroom teacher knows the class best and know their idiosyncrasies and their behavioural traits. They know who works well together and so on in groups, so they have a better understanding of the children and they have a better rapport and relationship . . . and then on the other side, sometimes they're not always as well equipped as they might think they'd like to be in terms of teaching music . . . To answer your question, I think it depends on what's required; I think that there is a place for a specialist in a school, where they can complement what's there and I don't think it's a good idea to try and just replace them. That's unfortunately been the practice for too long where the generalist sort of absolves themselves of this duty while the specialist comes in to take their class and I think that it's not whether it's an either/or. I think there's a place for both and ideally it would be that the specialist works alongside and in conjunction with the generalist teacher so that the generalist teacher is brought up to speed as much as the children are taught'* (Expert Interview Participant 1 – Irish).

A condensed summary and synthesis of both models of music education is shown in Figure 4.

Returning to the original question of the inquiry that asked how music education is realised at the primary/elementary level, some interesting findings emerge. While both models are vastly different in their approach to how music manifests itself in the primary/elementary school, there are some shared visions and challenges common to both the generalist and specialist teachers of music. Both specialist and generalist teachers wish to expand the modalities of their students within and through music. However, they are faced with similar challenges to the realisation of this goal. Certainly, the issue surrounding composing and the lack of time it receives in the curriculum needs to be considered for both the specialist and generalist teachers. Additional professional development particularly for generalist teachers who may have poor perceived competence and confidence in teaching music is suggested. Teacher training for generalist teachers demands significantly more time in order for teachers to develop the required basic skills, methodologies, confidence and content knowledge to deliver best practices in music education to their students. Schools and teachers should not have to rely on previous musical experiences undertaken personally and independently to their teacher training to equip them with the necessary content knowledge and skills. While some teachers will undoubtedly have more extensive musical backgrounds and training, a certain basic level of

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competency should be sought for generalist teachers that would include the minimum components of delivering the full music curriculum to students. The universal issue of time is one that features constantly in educational research. The prioritisation of literacy and numeracy agendas with the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) in Ireland and the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) in the United States has decreased time, attention and funding from many areas of the curriculum, including music. The place of music in the primary and elementary school needs to be reaffirmed in legislation at national level, and in policies, practices and procedures at school level. Knowing that developments at national level typically take time, the onus falls onto leaders of music within the teaching staff to inspire their colleagues in the realisation of best practices in music education within their schools and wider communities to bring about timely change for the betterment of music education for our students.

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