

# "World-Class Curriculum in Practise"

By Galina Zenin



**"...I am excited that you do so much music...My boy will love it!" – one mother replied.**

**"...We never listen to kids CD's, my daughter is not really interested in music..." – was another comment.**

**"...I don't think we need structured lessons... Our children should play and enjoy their childhood....they will have enough of learning at school..."**

**"...It's great that you offer structural sessions. My child is getting bored in his kinder! I want him to learn!"**

It was very clear to me that some parents had a very strong view of what early childhood education should provide and what kind of programme they prefer.

Choosing the right kinder, childcare centre or school is one of the hardest decisions parents have to make.

So how can our philosophy, values and curriculum suit everyone? How can we explain all the benefits of our programmes and stay strong in what we believe might help a child to reach their potential?

There are many different approaches in early childhood education that have proven themselves as outstanding curriculums with pioneer views and big visions. Their journey wasn't easy... How did the Montessori, Reggio Emilia and Steiner approach survive and become so strong over the years and even centuries?

## Vision, Implementation, Results & Reflection are the Key!

Starting in November 2006 with 3 children in one group was the beginning of a small and very different children's service in Brighton East, Melbourne.

From the first day of operating it was called "The First Music Kinder in Australia"...

And from the first day some people would ask: "What does this mean? Do you teach children to play instruments?..."

## Vision

After teaching music to children for more than 25 years, it was evident to me that music is powerful! I could see how music could change lives and characters of young people and could become a key for the development of the whole child. The vision was to use music as the foundation of a programme to nurture each individual, develop their sense of identity and unlock the door to reach their potential.

The question was: "How do we create a curriculum where music will become a strong and valuable foundation for children's learning? How do we include music in everyday activities? How do we make music available for EVERY CHILD, EVERY DAY?"

## Implementation

Creating a new, original or innovative idea takes a lot of work and time.

By working side by side with dedicated and open minded teachers, trusting and supportive parents, enthusiastic and honest children, and after three years of consistent and hard work, the vision was shaped, moulded and polished.

The vision of a programme where children could learn through singing, dancing and playing percussion instruments using the highly-regarded teaching approach of Kodaly and Orff, and where music is featured as an integral part in all lessons, including wellbeing, physical development, cultural identity, languages, literacy, numeracy, art and craft became a practice and the Bonkers Beat Music Programme was created.



For the first two years, running daily music sessions was part of my job, but when the second music kinder and childcare was opened it became physically and emotionally impossible for one person to drive from one suburb to another to reach all children and provide the music programme on a daily basis.

American speaker, author and toy-maker, Roger von Oech, whose focus is on the study of creativity said: "It's easy to come up with new ideas; the hard part is letting go of what worked for you two years ago, but will soon be out of date."

The idea of one person delivering the programme became out of date.

And that's when the concept of teaching early childhood educators became the opportunity to spread the power of music.

All teaching staff, from kinder teachers to assistants, were trained and became confident to deliver the music programme to EVERY CHILD... EVERY DAY! It took nearly two years to create, try out and test this new, innovative system which offered all staff continuous support as well as professional and personal development on a weekly basis.

## Results

The results were astonishing.

By experiencing and enjoying music every day, children and their behaviour started changing.

Through a number of surveys and questionnaires, parents outlined that after using the Bonkers Beat Music Programme, they witnessed significant improvements in their children's social skills, concentration,

speech, language, listening skills, gross motor and fine motor skills, co-operation and team work, patience, imagination, self-esteem, acceptance, memory, spatial intelligence, sense of beat, rhythm, singing, playing instruments, appreciation and love of music, multicultural and social identity.

Since 2007, more than 20 gifted children, children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or children with special needs and many more with English as their Second Language have attended Bonkers Beat centres. As a result of being in a mainstream environment and having music as a foundation for their learning, these children have shown a dramatic progress in their development.

In 2009 this unique "Singing Kindy" was featured on Channel 9 and in 2010 the Programme was selected by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria) and presented in the 2010 DEECD Innovation Showcase.

### Reflection

In our days of pressure and fast living, sometimes we get into the habit of doing the same things over and over again. From time to time we might feel scared to make a change or try something different. Often, we get criticised for not doing things the "usual" way. Believing in your dreams and working towards one goal with a team of supportive and dedicated people, will make a difference. It will help you to put your vision into practice.

One single idea of a Music Programme for EVERY CHILD EVERY DAY, was just the beginning of a comprehensive and innovative curriculum which is now successfully run in Australia. However, there is so much more for us to learn, that we can never say that all our work is done. There will always be many more opportunities to improve, make our curriculum better and reflect on the changes of our fast moving society.

### What is the main focus of the Bonkers Beat Curriculum?

*"...Will your programme help my child to read and write before he'll start school?..."*

*"...Can you help my child become independent? He will be going to prep next year..."*

*"..Could you teach my daughter to listen? She can't sit still for more than 5 minutes!..."*

*"...Don't you teach children math in kinder? They need to know how to count..."*

So many questions and so many expectations from parents...Where do we start?

I believe we should start with VALUES.

The Bonkers Beat Philosophy is based on Five Principles:

- Respect for all people
- Respect for all animals & living creatures
- Respect for all plants & nature
- Respect for kinder & personal belongings
- Respect for yourself

These Five Principles should be reflected in all programmes and every curriculum should have only one Main Focus – the CHILD!

Every child is the core of any curriculum and every programme needs to be designed to foster children's learning and development.

By having the CHILD as the primary focus of our curriculum, Bonkers Beat spreads the message that music is important for early childhood development. My dream is to see in the near future all kindergartens, childcare centres and even schools in Australia and other countries implementing music as a key to enhance children's learning. My dream is to help as many educators as possible become confident in providing music and wellbeing experiences to all children, every day. I encourage you all to look at your practice and ask yourself:

"What is the main focus of our curriculum? Is this working for me and for children? Are they really interested and engaged? Do I really know and understand every single child? What new and exciting ideas can I offer? What is my purpose and what is my vision?"

Remember every educator is a creator and every educator is an innovator and if our Main Focus' is the CHILD, we can all create a programme which one day we may call:

### "A World - Class Curriculum".

*"The main purpose of music is not to play an instrument in a band or to sing in an opera.... The main purpose of teaching music is to enrich the whole child, develop their cognitive abilities, increase their learning capacity and enhance the quality of their life. Remember, that music is like a language and should be practiced and used EVERY DAY!"*

– Galina Zenin

*Galina Zenin (B Mus. Ed., Dip. Teach.) is a presenter, early childhood educator, qualified and highly respected music and voice training teacher, author, composer and storyteller. She writes her own music and brings to her music programme a wealth of European and Australian experience and a high level of professionalism.*

*Galina Zenin has established herself as one of Australia's most innovative Music and Early Childhood Educators. Her most recent credits include presentations of her creative programmes, "Music for Learning" and "Wellbeing Practices for Life" at the 2010 & 2011 DEECD Innovation Showcases. Galina has been invited to present a wide range of music and wellbeing topics at a number of conferences and seminars in Australia and overseas.*

