

# STRUMMING YOUR WAY INTO FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATION

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## ABSTRACT

Most Foundation Phase (FP) students in South Africa arrive at university without having had any formal music training. Music skills must then be acquired in a fraction of one semester as part of a general Life Skills module. Education students in the FP have traditionally been taught to play the piano and/or recorder and/or Orff instruments with a two-fold aim – to be able to teach these instruments to learners and for accompaniment during music activities. The use of a guitar to replace the traditional choices could be beneficial to pre-service educators. The research question is: How suitable is the guitar as an instrument for Foundation Phase (FP) education students? Specific aims are to investigate the suitability, benefits and impact of the guitar in Foundation Phase courses and the guitar learning process. Results of this study show that a guitar is a rational choice for use in FP educator training.

**Keywords:** generalist educators, guitar, Foundation Phase, music, percussion instruments, recorder

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Students in Foundation Phase courses in South Africa, like in Greece (Koutsoupidou 2010), often have had no formal music training when arriving at university. Foundation Phase courses typically include learning how to play an instrument and in South Africa mostly focus on piano, recorder and percussion training. The National Policy on Minimum Requirements for teacher qualifications (2011) does not specifically require students to learn to play an instrument but when analysing the South African school curriculum (CAPS), it is clear that playing an instrument would be advantageous to any generalist educator. The main reason for learning to play an instrument as a Foundation Phase teacher is for accompaniment during classroom singing and the support of other music activities required in the curriculum. However, due to the high poverty rate in the country, very few schools can give their learners the opportunity to learn to play an instrument and the main reason for a teacher being able to play an instrument has become for accompaniment, rather than teaching all learners to play.

Foundation phase education courses before 1994 usually had music modules that lasted

for at least one year and generally up to three years. Group tuition was done in keyboard playing in music studios with electronic instruments. Orff instrument techniques and recorder playing were added to this curriculum to ensure that a reasonable modicum of knowledge was obtained during this period.

Most current Foundation Phase courses have only one semester dedicated to all the arts (dance, drama, music and visual arts) and an immense amount of work is crammed into this time to ensure that students know all the elements and principles of the arts as well as teaching methods (De Vries 2011; Jeanneret 1997), making it extremely difficult to also accommodate the learning of an instrument.

This study came about when the researcher, as developer of a new module for the arts, questioned the reasons for learning to play a recorder, percussion instruments or piano rather than a guitar. Through personal experience as a music teacher, several difficulties were experienced by the researcher in the singing class with bad behaviour often taking place behind the piano where the teacher could not see. Despite good piano skills it was difficult to maintain discipline whilst playing. The researcher then resorted to a self-taught instrument, the guitar. This instrument immediately brought about a different attitude from the learners because they regarded it as being more modern. It was easy to play chord accompaniment, sing along and interact with learners in the class ensuring optimum participation.

The recorder was not considered as an alternative option for accompaniment in large classes since the volume would not have been sufficient and the timbre would not have been broad enough to support singing.

Previous studies show that educators end up never using the instrument they were taught to play at university due to various factors, including the absence of instruments in schools (Jansen van Vuuren 2010; Koutsoupido 2010; Kite 1994) and the lack of confidence regarding musical ability (De Vries 2011; Holden and Button 2006; Koutsoupidou 2010; Temmerman 2006). However, teachers who have appropriate skills on a more popular instrument like a guitar, might have more confidence to utilise their instruments throughout their teaching careers.

The choice of musical instrument in teacher training courses mainly depends on two factors: the skills of the lecturer and the availability of the instruments. Morin (1994, 8) warns that the lecturers' aim should be to empower pre-service educators with suitable skills for the classroom and should avoid "imposing their own course content agendas" on teachers. To adhere to Morin's advice is not always possible since many lecturers in generalist courses end up having to teach a variety of subjects under the Life Skills banner and do not always have a

sound knowledge of all the required components. The subject Life Skills in the South African CAPS curriculum encompasses: Personal and Social Well-Being, Beginning Knowledge, Physical Education and Creative Arts. Creative Arts is then further subdivided into Visual Arts and Performing Arts (Dance, Drama and Music). Lecturers rely on their existing skills and choose the musical instruments for training teachers accordingly.

Being a lecturer at a new university had the advantage of making new decisions regarding instrument choice. However, a decision could not be made before investigating the suitability of the guitar as the instrument of choice and obtaining some guitars to use for teaching.

The core research problem could be stated as follows: Is the guitar a suitable instrument to teach pre-service Foundation Phase educators? Specific research objectives were, exploring the necessity of musical accompaniment in the Foundation Phase, the reasons for teachers learning to play an instrument in Foundation Phase courses, the benefits to the educator, the general impact in the classroom, and the possibility of learning to play a guitar in such a limited time span.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: A literature section is followed by the methodology and data collection, results and a conclusion.

## **LITERATURE**

South African pre-service early childhood teachers, like many of their worldwide counterparts, arrive at university with little or no knowledge of music, let alone the ability to play an instrument (Koutsoupido 2010). Generalist pre-service educators have to learn to teach music but have no formal music background. The lack of sufficient and creative music training during the school years result in pre-service educators with no music foundation. When insufficient pre-service preparation is added to the deficit of prior knowledge, generalist educators have very little confidence in teaching music (Bartel et al. 2004; Economidou-Stavrou and Telemachou 2006). Many universities have only one module dedicated to gaining music skills (Economidou-Stavrou and Telemachou 2006) and some have even less – four to five lectures which translates to between six and seven-and-a-half hours' tuition. The situation where such an important facet of education is continually neglected has been researched and discussed for many decades, yet there seems to be very little progress in assisting generalist educators to cope with teaching music in the classroom. Most South African universities like universities in the rest of the world (Kite 1994) offer one or more instruments, including piano, percussion and recorders, in their Foundation Phase courses to students who have no formal music background.

African students, who form the majority in South African universities, usually have the

ability to play percussion instruments since it is part of their cultural heritage so when percussion is taught as part of a Foundation Phase course, students would not gain new skills. Although guitar is used in a form of traditional Zulu music in South Africa (Maskandi) very few African youngsters can play the instrument and including it in an education module would not only assist as a resource in the classroom but also assist with strengthening cultural arts.

Before investigating the suitability of the guitar as choice, it is necessary to determine whether music and musical instruments for accompaniment have a place in Foundation Phase classrooms. As emphasised by Esimone and Ojukwu (2014, 39), “[music’s] role in early childhood education in the social, psychological and spiritual development of the children surpasses what mere words can explain”. It is one of the most enjoyable ways to learn and has always been seen as such. In addition, Wright (2003) reminds the reader that the Arts offers very young children significant ways of knowing about themselves, others and the world.

Voice is generally considered as being the most suitable instrument for teaching singing and other music concepts in the Foundation Phase and it is suggested that a capella singing must be used to gain voice stability before gradually integrating accompaniment (Hedden 2012; Rogers et al. 2008; Stauffer 1985). Once voice stability has been obtained, researchers like Atterbury and Silcox (1993) and Hedden (2012) say that whether a child sings with or without accompaniment (melodic, harmonic or a combination of the two) has no impact on singing accuracy. Hale (1977) differs from them and argues that a combination of melodic and harmonic accompaniment resulted in greater singing accuracy compared to harmonic accompaniment alone.

When studying the literature, it is unfortunately also evident that many teachers are not comfortable singing a capella in front of a class. To overcome this fear is easier when having a musical instrument as a crutch which would then result in the teacher’s voice providing the melodic accompaniment and the guitar providing harmonic accompaniment. Heyworth (2011) concurs that when students learn to play the guitar, the focus is on the guitar and not on themselves singing and this is of assistance to give confidence as attested to by fifty per cent of the respondents in his research who feared singing in the classroom. The researcher further agrees with Persellin (2003, 6) that “accompaniment can be used to enrich and expand [children’s] musical experiences”. When varying a capella and accompanied singing, excitement and interest are stimulated. The guitar is particularly suited to accompany young children’s voices since it is not too loud and supports singing in young children rather than drowning it out (Vaillancourt 2013).

When studying the South African Foundation Phase syllabus (CAPS 2011, 13–14) it is

clear that all educators will benefit from playing an instrument since it lists “musical instruments” as suggested resources. Every section under “Creative games and skills” and “Improvise and interpret” requires the use of songs, rhythm work, percussion playing and movement. All these activities are improved through the use of a musical instrument. To empower the student educator with instrumental skills seems a necessity but mixed opinions still exist about instrumental learning in teacher education courses. Studies done by Stevens-Ballenger, Jeanneret and Forrest (2010) showed that educators deemed it important for generalist educators in the primary school to be able to play instruments. The preferred instruments in order of preference were the piano, recorder, guitar or ukulele. In contrast, in research done by Temmerman (2006) and Morin (1994), in-service educators felt that it was useless to learn to play the guitar or recorder at university because of the limited time available. They are of the opinion that it would have been more valuable to learn how to integrate the arts across the curriculum.

The researcher sides with the many positive voices promoting guitar playing in the Foundation Phase classroom because the guitar is easy to learn and with only three chords (Timmerman and Griffith 1969) a person can play a large repertoire of suitable children’s songs. The style of “hum and strum” as referred to by Bartel (1990) with the objective of enabling the student to accompany children with basic first-position chords is the ideal method to use in educator training programmes. The guitar as an instrument for use in schools is advocated by several researchers like Vaillancourt (2013), McDonald, Simons and McCoy (1989), Pugh and Pugh (2013), and Glover and Ward (1993). The non-profit organisation, Guitars in the Classroom (GITC) (2013) offers free guitar training programmes to teachers in America and has seen the positive results. Seventy-five per cent of educators who enrol with GITC have no prior musical experience and the majority are elementary teachers who, once they achieved competence and confidence leading music, integrate music on an on-going basis for the duration of their careers in the classroom.

Besides being suitable for accompaniment, the researcher concurs with Hedden (2012) who says that an instrument adds an interesting dimension to any class and brings about excitement amongst learners.

It is my view that the situation where educators enter the teaching profession with questionable music knowledge, can be remedied. White’s (2006) research shows that when pre-service educators are involved in creative experiences during their university years, they will show more creativity in their teaching. This implies that creative music-making during student years can assist with confidence building to encourage pre-service educators to teach music

with more enthusiasm and integrate it successfully into the rest of the curriculum.

The confidence that is brought about by instrumental skills in the classroom is stated by Rogers et al. (2008) who found that pre-service teachers learning to play a musical instrument were the most confident when it came to teaching music. The additional benefits of learning the guitar were also seen in a “Guitars in the Classroom” project at the University of California, where a guitar course improved the personal happiness of students. An “improved instruction and student achievement, class climate and inspiration for creative expression” (Peretti 2007, 4) were noted. In research done by De Vries (2011) two teachers who are also guitarists indicated that they have their guitars at school and regularly bring the instrument out to accompany singing due to the children asking for it. They say that it adds to the atmosphere of the class and that the children’s “faces light up when they see it come out”. One of the guitarists in this study adds that when they play in class, they are a musician and a role model that shows children that an adult can be a musician and really enjoy playing even when they have a regular job. There are many advocates for guitar accompaniment, including De Vries (2011) and Silverman (2011, 290) who state that “[s]ongleading with guitar accompaniment [...] is an essential skill for music education [...] students”. The researcher concurs with Heyworth (2011), who urges stakeholders in teacher education to be “modern and engaging and to move to guitar because it is easy to play and also portable”.

Peretti (2007) adds another dimension when she names the main benefits of guitar playing in class as improved content learning and affecting mood positively. Children at schools where education students played the guitar continually mentioned the guitar playing when they were asked about the lessons – without being asked about the guitars – it thus made a big impression on them and these were their favourite lessons.

Peretti’s (2007, 6) students’ “comments suggest that new teachers will benefit from entering the field with the ability to integrate music with guitar for academic achievement and establishing a positive classroom climate”. Timmerman and Griffith (1969) also mentioned this and added that the guitar sparks interest amongst indifferent students. One of the most valuable statements is made by Copeland (2010) who reminds us that pianos are not readily available and that the guitar is portable and one of the most commonly used folk instruments throughout history. Portability is certainly an advantage in South Africa where many classrooms are not secured and nothing can be stored safely.

The main challenge in teaching pre-service educators to play an instrument is to provide pre-service educators with adequate time to give them the opportunity to be part of regular music-making, rather than just teaching them basic theoretical concepts and hoping they will

have the courage to use music in the classroom. As Economidou-Stavrou rightfully remarks:

“There is no doubt that during a semester or two, it is very hard to teach someone that has no or very little musical knowledge how to perform, how to listen actively and how to create music and, even harder, how to teach music to children” (2006, 47).

Music courses at the researcher’s university get taught as part of a general arts module which comprises of 12–14 formal lectures and the same amount of tutorial time which must be equally divided between the arts thus translating into three or four music lectures and the same amount of tutorial time. De Vries (2011), Temmerman (2006) and Heyworth (2011) mention the same limitation in Australian curricula. The limited time cannot ensure confident generalist music educators who have mastered a single instrument, “let alone the cadre of instruments often introduced in that short period of time” (Kite 1994, 2). One of the few instruments that can be learnt by a generalist educator with no formal music background in a relatively short time span is the guitar. With only three chords needed to play a large repertoire of suitable children’s songs (Timmerman and Griffith 1969; Heyworth 2011) the guitar becomes a good option for teacher training. According to studies by Timmerman and Griffith (1969), guitar students could play seven chords fluently after ten-weeks of seventeen-minute sessions. This is a definite indication that the three primary chords of the suggested course below can be attained in the short time span. This research also tallies with the previous experience the researcher had in teaching guitar to teenagers.

## **METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION**

Mixed methods research as described by Creswell and Clark (2005) suited the study best and it was done through a pragmatic paradigm where a real-world scenario was investigated. The research design contained elements of experimental work and participatory research where the process and outcomes of guitar tuition in large groups were notated during a six-week guitar tuition course presented to four cohorts over a four-year period. Purposive and convenience sampling was done to include educators, lecturers and subject advisors who have enough work experience in Foundation Phase education to be able to give a balanced view of their experiences and the needs of their learners, students or educators in the music context. The respondents completed open-ended questionnaires and did interviews with the researcher to ascertain what instrumental tuition they received during pre-service training and how it has benefitted or hampered them in the classroom. In addition, subject advisors for Life Skills were asked what they observed in Foundation Phase classrooms with regards to the use of musical instruments.

In addition, observation of in-service educators and their needs was done over a period of five years in the capacity of subject advisor for the arts during school visits and workshops for music.

Furthermore, literature was studied to seek national and international trends in dealing with musical instrument tuition in elementary educators' courses and to determine the suitability of guitar usage in the Foundation Phase classroom.

All participants that were interviewed or who responded to questionnaires signed a letter of consent acknowledging their freedom of choice to participate in the research.

## **RESULTS**

The information below was mainly gained through interviews, questionnaires and observation.

### **Lecturers**

All lecturers concurred that limited time was a challenge in music modules and consequently suggested that a music course should run throughout the year. It is interesting to note that these lecturers do not refer to Arts in general but specifically to music, which would suggest that the other art forms should be accommodated in a separate module. One lecturer added that it would be impossible to give music its rightful place in education if generalist educators were not confident with their musical abilities and she reiterated that the required confidence levels can only be reached if sufficient time is made available. As far as the use of specific instruments are concerned it was noted that one university uses melodic and non-melodic percussion because these instruments are available at the university and is easy to learn to play. However, it must be considered that these instruments are very expensive and schools rarely have them available. The lecturer at this specific university adds that had she been given a choice, she would have preferred to teach ukulele since she is of the opinion that you can accompany more singing with it. However, she realises that the limited time will not suffice to prepare teachers successfully in playing the ukulele. Respondents from another university make use of recorders and yet another university has a combination of percussion and guitar.

### **Subject advisors**

Four subject advisors in the subject Arts and Culture/Life Skills were interviewed. Two were taught piano, percussion and recorder during their music training which lasted for a year. Their music background gained during their school years assisted them in being successful during the music course at university level and they also further developed their own skills by learning to



play other instruments. The third advisor only recalls doing singing and dancing during teacher training whilst the fourth subject advisor does recall some percussion work. However, despite most teachers being trained to use music during their initial training, the subject advisors rarely observed educators in their districts playing musical instruments during their teaching and they contributed it to educators not having been taught any instrumental music skills. Everybody in this group agreed that being able to play accompaniment on a musical instrument during lessons gives a teacher an advantage over their counterparts since the children are interested and fascinated by musical instruments.

One subject advisor expressed her need for learning to play a string instrument so that she could transfer her skills to teachers in her circuit, whilst another one with guitar skills spoke about the immense difference the guitar made in her teaching at different levels of the schooling system.

## **Educators**

The educator respondents have all had some form of music training for an extended period (2 to 3 years) during their years of education studies – mostly piano. Consequently, educators A and B, who have access to a piano at school, still use the piano if it is available and not being used by another educator. Challenges experienced were mostly due to the availability of the piano and/or venue. Due to their size and sensitivity to movement, pianos are usually placed in the school hall which complicates its use if more than one teacher wants access to it. Singing with the piano thus cannot be integrated into teaching at any time of the day but has to be an arranged event, which is not conducive for music integrated teaching. Educator C can play the piano, but like in most South African schools, there is no piano at school. Educator D had percussion training but does not use it due to not having the necessary instruments and says, “I do not have time to make instruments for the almost 40 children in my class and there is no time in the curriculum to let them do it. They do not have food at home – where will they get glue and tape and other things to make instruments?” When asked which instrument they would have preferred if they had a choice during their training, three of the educator respondents opted for the guitar whilst one educator would have preferred to learn to play the ukulele.

## **Researcher's experience**

Having used percussion, recorder, piano and guitar in different phases of her career the researcher has experienced the following: Most musical instruments are of value for accompaniment if used in the correct setting and can be utilised to teach music concepts. The

recorder is affordable and portable. Students can learn to play a small repertoire on the recorder in a time frame of six weeks. It is however not possible to communicate with a class whilst playing the recorder. The piano is valuable for teaching music concepts if the school is privileged enough to own a piano, however, the structure of the traditional upright piano can mask some children, which in turn could lead to disciplinary problems. Furthermore, pianos are very expensive to buy for university training programmes if it is considered that student cohorts average a 100 students. Percussion instruments can be used in most settings, besides allowing for creativity they are easy and affordable to make so that all children can participate in music activities. Melodic percussion instruments are too expensive for many schools and are not effective as single instruments for accompaniment. Guitars are very suitable for harmonic accompaniment, especially for young voices. The instrument is relatively inexpensive and portable. It is easy to learn to play a large repertoire of songs in six weeks through the use of just three chords and the educator has full control of the class whilst playing because of being able to speak or sing simultaneously. Important to consider is the effect the guitar has on learners who find the guitar very interesting and often express the desire to learn to play it.

### **Teaching the newly developed guitar course for Foundation Phase students**

Taking all the studied information into account, the researcher decided that the guitar would be used during her module as instrument of choice. After securing guitars from the National Institute of Higher Education (NIHE) the basic guitar course for Foundation Phase pre-service educators commenced. The weekly lecture time of 90 minutes was mostly utilised for theoretical and didactical skills in music as well as repertoire and percussion. The tutorial time was used for the practical guitar lessons. The groups had to be divided into smaller groups in line with venue size and the number of guitars, because of the lectures averaging 100 students.

Preceding the six-week programme of guitar tuition the full cohort of second-year students had an introduction lecture as described below. Included in the lecture was how to differentiate between different guitars, caring for a guitar, parts of the guitar and other essential terminology, for example, tuning pegs, fingerboard, strings and frets. The guitar book that was designed with worksheets and a variety of art, dance, drama and music activities was discussed, and it was explained to students how it could be utilised in a classroom in an integrated way. The rubric that would be used for final assessment was discussed and students were given their timetables for their guitar classes.

With the university being new and having no senior students to take up tutor positions, one of the groups' students who showed a special interest was taught the three chords two weeks

prior to the start of the module and assisted the lecturer as a tutor. Although this tutor was not a competent musician, he was invaluable. He moved around the music room and assisted students who had difficulty with chord placement and basic strumming patterns.

Prior to the first lesson, 35 guitars were tuned. Tuning the guitars proved to be a major task due to not having an electronic guitar tuner. Other challenges included guitar strings stretching and the student tutor not having the skill to tune the guitars. The tutor was assisted with the downloading of a guitar tuner application for his cell phone but could not develop the speed required to tune such a large number of instruments. Ensuring that all guitars were tuned became a weekly burden for the lecturer.

The course described below was the initial course as offered in 2014. Subsequent additions and amendments to the course are described after the course content.

## **Lesson 1**

The first lesson had a troublesome start due to the new guitar strings stretching and causing the guitars to be out of tune, an unsuitable venue and no idea of guitar playing on the part of the students. However, the enthusiasm was contagious and we started by learning how to hold the guitar correctly, followed by the teaching of the A major chord and basic four-time strumming. The A major chord was chosen as a starting point because of the placement pattern being easy to remember. The tutor moved amongst the students whilst the lecturer was modelling the rhythm and chords by playing it and the students following. Problems with fine motor skills were noticed amongst some of the students who found it very difficult to place their fingers on the fingerboard. At least four or five students per group battled to place their fingers and could not press them down on specific strings – even with repeated placement by lecturer and tutor. A number of the students had the problem of their fingers being too big to place accurately on the fingerboard and had to use two fingers to press a root chord instead of the normal three fingers. The majority of students coped very well with the strumming and beat.

The new chord, D major, was learnt and then the lecturer and students sang and played two songs using only one chord: Three blind mice and Brother John. The procedure was repeated using the same songs but playing them in A major. We did 4-beat rhythms and strumming – using “thumb” – pulling down on strings on beat 1 and 3. Beat 2 was done with “hand” – brushing down on strings with the four remaining fingers. It was emphasised that beat 1 and 3 must be louder than 2 and 4. We then attempted changing from A major chord to D major chord without stopping the strumming. Laughter erupted due to coordination problems! The majority of the students managed to master the placement of the D major and A major

chords and remember the names of the chords.

Students were encouraged to practice guitar during specially allocated times with the tutor present.

## **Lesson 2**

As before, the tuning of 35 new classical guitars was time-consuming. A very small group of students turned up but the group grew as the lesson progressed. Some of the students were so enthusiastic that they did not want to leave when their lesson was over and the next group arrived. The tutor, despite also being a beginner was very dedicated and motivated and the lecturer could continue teaching and playing whilst he was walking around the room correcting errors. Although the changing of chords was still a challenge, we played through the following songs: Brother John, Three blind mice and Mary had a little lamb. The songs were repeated using different tempos and dynamic differences and referring to the elements of music learnt during formal lectures. Students who were hanging around the music venue asked if they could join the group with percussion playing. The added instruments helped to make the repetitive playing less boring. Just for entertainment, the lecturer started singing Nginesiponono – a traditional isiZulu song with fast changing chords (D and A major). Some students tried to join in but others just sang and laughed at their inability to get to the correct chord in time. Students were taught how to do dramatic “rolling strumming” to end lively songs and due to the success wanted to end every song with this dramatic roll. The G major chord was taught and this took quite long to master. Part of the challenge was the fact that students could not distinguish between the strings. When they were told to place their fourth finger on the bottom string, they would place it on any string! This challenge was addressed with the lecturer getting everybody to pluck a specific string on command to get the students used to the different strings. All three major chords D, G and A were practiced in a pattern: D x 8 beats, G x 8 beats, A x 8 beats. The number of beats was gradually reduced from eight to four beats and then to two beats – making the chord changes faster. Some very good progress was made and towards the end of the lesson the students were playing and singing and changing! It was interesting that after getting to know the basic melodies of the English nursery songs, students started singing typical African harmonies.

Practice sessions with the tutor were made available for interested students.

## **Lesson 3**

The fact that the lessons were taking place during tutorial time which is outside formal lecture

times, meant that a few students saw this as an ideal to play truant to avoid doing something with which they were not familiar. After being reprimanded, these truant students turned up for their first lesson and were noticeably lost with the guitar playing. At the same time, regular students were already experimenting with new rhythms and using some of the percussion instruments to play together before and during the lesson. The tutor identified the students who were not there before and took them outside to assist them with the basics. One student in class held her guitar with the neck in the right hand, and when asked whether she was left-handed, she replied negatively. She was asked to turn her guitar so that the neck was in their left hand – like the rest of the students. The student could not manage to work that out and turned the guitar so that the strings were facing her body. This action made the researcher wonder if the student could be dealing with spatial orientation problems.

During this lesson, four-beat and three-beat rhythms with chord changes were practiced as a way of warming up. We played through several songs in the book (D major): Row, row, row your boat; The wheels on the bus; Mary had a little lamb; Five little monkeys; The itsy bitsy spider; You are my sunshine; Baa, baa black sheep; My Bonnie; Away in a manger; The alphabet song; and Twinkle, twinkle little star. Baa, baa black sheep caused considerable problems due to the fast chord changes.

The tutor reported that more than half of the students were coming to weekly practice sessions.

#### **Lesson 4**

During lesson four, all songs were revised, and additional students joined in with percussion instruments for some variation. The percussion was firstly discussed with the students so that they could suggest how and when each instrument should be used to convey the correct mood and meaning of the different songs. Singing was improving, and the concentration and excitement were conspicuous. All students were given the opportunity to play their three chords on their own so that the lecturer could hear if they were placing their fingers correctly and getting a good sound. The tutor was assisting students who had difficulties with their playing.

#### **Lesson 5**

Although students had organised access to guitars through the tutor, it was very difficult for them to find practice time in their busy schedules. This challenge was exacerbated by students not having their own guitars to practice when they had spare time. Some students were, however, noticed practicing in little groups in the vicinity of the music room.

In lesson five, the two songs that were being used for evaluation, My Bonnie (three-beat) and You are my sunshine (four-beat) were practiced. Most students were coping remarkably well and were enjoying the playing and singing. Students waiting for their lesson were experimenting with percussion instruments and the ensemble work lured many spectators.

## Lesson 6

The assessment took place in 10-minute sessions. Eleven students were accommodated in each group and presented the two songs they had learnt. The majority of students were very successful and their Facebook walls invariably showed them in a pose with a guitar. Unfortunately, there were three students who had never attended any classes and who were not successful during assessment. Figure 1 below shows the rubric used for assessment.

| Criteria      | 9–10   | 7–8  | 5–6   | 3–4                                    | 1–2   | 0       | Song 1 | Song 2 |
|---------------|--|--|---|--|---|---------|--------|--------|
| D major chord | Perfect instant placement                          | Very good placement with slight hesitation | Good placement but takes too long             | Hesitant with placement and takes long | Very uncertain about placement              | No idea |        |        |
| G major chord | Perfect placement                                  | Very good placement with slight hesitation | Good placement but takes too long             | Hesitant placement that takes too long | Very uncertain about placement              | No idea |        |        |
| A major chord | Perfect placement                                  | Very good placement with slight hesitation | Good placement but takes too long             | Hesitant placement that takes too long | Very uncertain about placement              | No idea |        |        |
| Chord changes | Swift accurate changing maintaining perfect rhythm | Very good changing but slightly too slow   | Reasonable changing but with interrupted beat | Slow changing with interrupted beat    | Cannot change whilst keeping a rhythm going | No idea |        |        |
| Rhythm        | Accurate rhythm playing with correct accents       | Good rhythm with reasonable accents        | Reasonable rhythm but cannot maintain it      | Interrupted rhythm but can recover     | Incorrect rhythm                            | No idea |        |        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  |  |  |   |  |   | Max: 50 |        |        |

Figure 1: Guitar assessment rubric.

## ADDITIONS AND AMENDMENTS

Although most of the course has remained the same as described above, the following changes were made in an attempt to obtain better outcomes during 2015, 2016 and 2017.

In 2016, the programme was fortunate to have two students who could already play a variety of instruments, including the guitar. This made it easier for the lecturer because the tutors were able to tune the guitars and were given authority to arrange practice sessions to suit their own timetables. These tutors divided the students into smaller groups and made a guitar

available to each group for practice purposes. The additional practice time and assistance from capable guitarists showed during the assessment when it was evident that more students were playing with ease and showing confidence. Having some competent musicians on campus saw the development of some bands and this certainly added to the status of playing the guitar.

Unfortunately, not much of the work done during the music module was transferred to the classroom. Very few students borrowed instruments for use during their micro-teaching. After a discussion with the first cohort of students who attended the guitar course, it was clear that skill retention was a problem. Not having their own instruments at their disposal made it difficult to retain the skills that were newly gained.

During 2016, more songs were added to the guitar book, and students coped with the augmented repertoire. The tutors had a more organised practice timetable, and attendance was monitored. The level of playing improved to the extent that the assessment rubric was changed to include three songs instead of the two from the past.

In 2017, the university appointed four tutors for courses that have more extensive practical work. A more integrated teaching approach also freed two lectures that could be used for more practical work. With four tutors on the floor amongst the students when playing guitar, challenges were quickly resolved and all students could be monitored for optimum participation. Having more tutors also meant that groups were smaller during practice times. For the first time, students had a lesson where they were taught folk and pop songs for their own enjoyment rather than only focussing on children's songs.

## **CONCLUSION**

“As a solo or ensemble instrument, the guitar has been championed by the masses, the virtuosi, the nobility, the Latin American Indians, cowboys, teenagers, rock stars, African American blues musicians and people from all walks of life” (Gustafson 1996, 2). The data in this study confirms that the guitar should be championed by teachers because it is a suitable option for Foundation Phase teachers to learn as part of their music module during training. The study shows that the guitar is ideal for harmonic accompaniment of young voices and assists in creating a positive classroom atmosphere. The learning process and emotional well-being of learners was improved and learners are excited when the guitar is used in lessons. It is possible for a pre-service non-musician to gain sufficient guitar skills in 6 weeks to be able to use it in class. Besides being portable and relatively easy to learn to play the basics in a very limited time, it has the added spin-offs of personal enjoyment and classroom confidence for the teacher.

The only matter that remains a challenge is the retention of skill. The newly-acquired

guitar skills of pre-service teachers cannot be retained if enough time is not allocated to the music module. To play a musical instrument is not in the same class as “riding a bicycle” and to teach in an integrated manner, as is required by the curriculum, will not be realised by general teachers until the Arts are given enough time in pre-service curricula to ensure retention of skills. A guitar in the hand is worth much more than can be imagined.

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