

Raising the musical self-efficacy of classroom teachers:

Best practice collaborative strategies for visiting artists

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This laymans summary was adapted from: Cortez, K. (2020). *Raising the musical self-efficacy of classroom teachers: Best practice collaborative strategies for visiting artists*. [Unpublished honours thesis, University of Sydney]. USYD SeS Repository. <https://hdl.handle.net/2123/24519>

Why was the research conducted?

This research project was inspired by my pre-existing quartet, Quart-Ed, and the challenges we were noticing in our work in primary schools. Quart-Ed is an ensemble made up of Sydney Conservatorium Music Education graduates and is a creative avenue for our training that nurtured both performance and classroom teaching.



“This is probably the only music these kids will get this year!”

Founded in 2018 by a drive to show our audiences their own musical capabilities, we were uncomfortable with the self-deprecating comments that seemed to lace the compliments to our work. Unsatisfied with leaving our student audience inspired but our teacher audience insecure, we used an action research model to investigate ways to bolster teacher’s **musical self-efficacy**: their belief in their ability to engage in musical activities.

“I’m not very musical, so it’s good you’re here.”



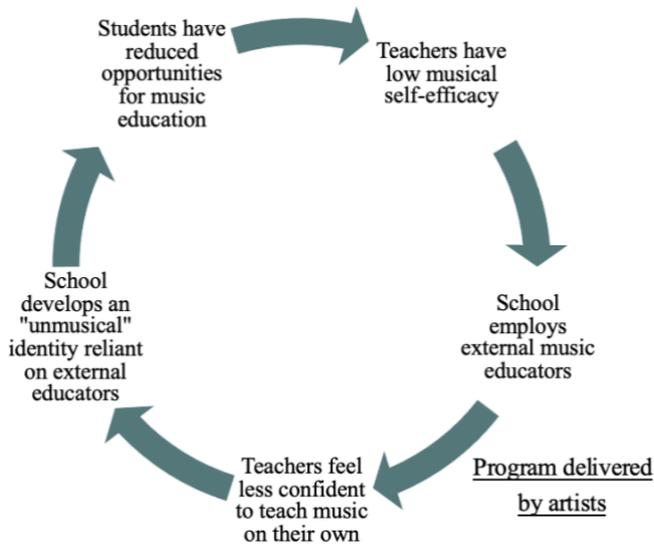
82% of surveyed Australian pre-service teachers believe they lack personal musical experiences, and consider it a barrier to teaching music in their future classrooms.

(Russell-Bowie, 2009)

Only 37% of Australian primary teachers are teaching music regularly.

(de Vries, 2017)

What did the research aim to do?



Previous research has identified a positive feedback loop, where teacher's low self-efficacy gets lower with the involvement of visiting artists, increasing their reliance on them, and so on (Christophersen, 2013; Snook & Buck, 2014).

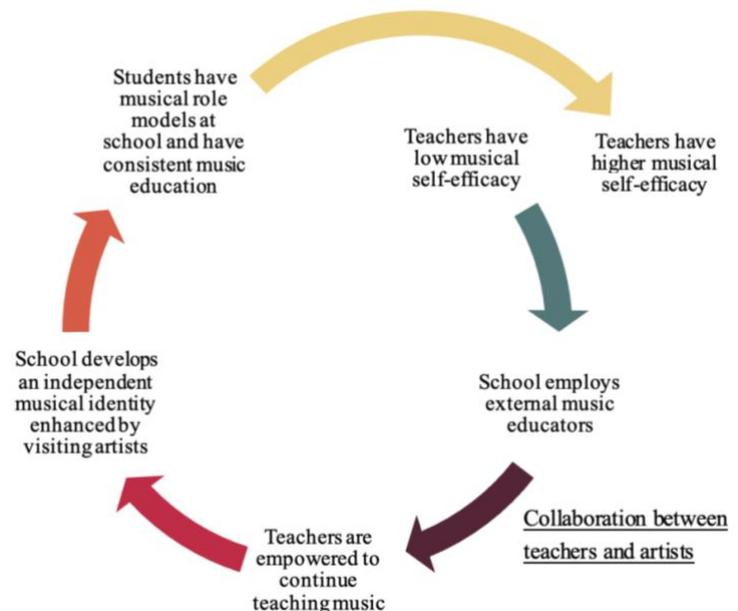
While **collaboration** was their agreed solution to this problem, no viable solutions had yet been put forward for visiting artists who visit schools once – which was our predominant mode of program delivery.

Using Partington's guidelines for positive teacher-artist relationships (2018), we collaborated with a school's set of Stage 3 teachers to create a program to deliver to their classes. The aim was to investigate how to develop an equitable balance of power, and to grow the teachers' musical self-efficacy so that the net effect of the whole experience was beneficial.

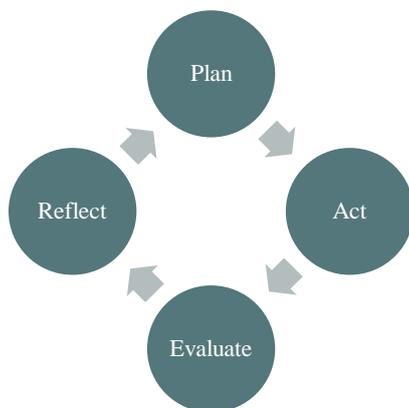


Partington's Guidelines for Teacher-Artist Collaboration (2018)

This project was unique in using an **action research approach**, a research style which relies on the participants' feedback to inform decision-making. This allowed me to honour and highlight the equality of power both between quartet members, and between Quart-Ed and the teachers.



What were the results of the study?



The project took place under the four phases of Action Research, going through one cycle of Plan, Act, Evaluate and Reflect. At each of these phases, new things about developing positive teacher-artist partnerships were discovered. The following results will be structured according to these phases.

Planning phase: Introduction to the participants

By interviewing Quart-Ed and the teachers, I was able to gain some understanding of the beliefs each party held about the nature of “being musical”, and what they thought the project would be like. The results showed a clear divide in ideas between the teachers and Quart-Ed.



Acting Phase: Collaborative Meetings

Two meetings were held preceding our visit to the school, one online and one face-to-face. Many strategies were attempted by Quart-Ed, both planned and spontaneous, to either promote an equal power balance between parties or to boost the musical self-efficacy of the teachers. Their effectiveness as discussed by the participants are described below.

Strategy	Meeting	Desired outcome	Actual outcome
Conversational “ice breakers” using prompt questions	Online	Power balance: Bridge social gaps by “sharing vulnerabilities and experience”	As the first ever activity together, it was a time-consuming, heavy-handed attempt at vulnerability. With lighter questions this strategy could be effective, but the participants felt it took up more time than necessary. Rapport was significantly better face-to-face without any prompt to socialise.
Refer to teachers’ known music during discussions	Both	Power balance: Encourage teacher involvement	Having a shared vocabulary of music helped communicate ideas clearly, and as a bonus validated teacher knowledge as useful musical knowledge.
Refer to communicated goals when suggesting repertoire	Both	Power balance: Centre decision-making around teacher needs	Teachers’ wishes were the anchor for suggested options. Options not tied explicitly to teacher goals didn’t prompt collaborative discussion given the teachers’ limited experience turning musical repertoire into classroom activities.
Use repertoire removed from Western art music tradition	Both	Self-efficacy: Widen the scope of what “qualifies” as music education.	Demonstrating music education that required no formal training, traditional notation skills nor instruments seemed to be encouraging for the teachers.
Musical “ice breaker” activity	Face-to-face	Self-efficacy: Demonstrate accessibility of musical activities	A poor starter to the meeting, highlighting the teachers’ inexperience rather than creating a collaborative atmosphere. Would have been more appropriate later as a part of a discussion.
Perform a piece live or show repertoire with videos	Both	Power balance: Encourage teacher contribution	Teachers seemed like comfortable audience members and contributed significantly more ideas. Visuals added context and gave an opportunity to understand the experience the students would be having.
Present repertoire / activities as flexible to teacher / student needs	Both	Power balance and self-efficacy: Encourage teachers to “edit” our work	Classroom activities were tailored to teacher confidence, increasing the likelihood of completing them to a high standard with their classes, and increasing their time as musical leaders in the project.

Evaluating Phase: Program Delivery

As part of our aim was to improve the value of a single school visit through collaborative pre-meetings, we used the day of program delivery to evaluate the effectiveness of that process. Our conclusions are summarized below.

Behaviour Management

- Pre-existing rapport meant teachers and artists could comfortably share the "instructional space" at the front of the room. Teachers could use their knowledge of their students to select good candidates for volunteer tasks and answering questions
- Understanding the contents of the program meant that the teachers were able to plan for optimal student behaviour: e.g. placing disruptive students away from each other, planning free time before program in anticipation of going overtime

Musical Leadership

- Pre-program activity of creating a class soundscape gave teachers an opportunity to be the musical leaders
- Pre-program activity seemed to give teachers practice at having musical authority, giving critical and constructive feedback to the students that improved their musical outcomes

Teaching-as-Modelling

- Teacher-artist partner work allowed artists to model music teaching strategies that could be used post-program, such as teaching composition and creating a scaffold for giving performance/composition feedback
- (The partner work emerged as an on-the-day strategy and could have contributed more to teacher musical self-efficacy had partners been established at the pre-meetings)

Musical Outcomes for Students

- Students received a cohesive, multi-week music unit tailored to their abilities and the teaching confidence of their teacher, including a tangible goal of a performance
- Students performance allowed Quart-Ed the opportunity to model being engaged listeners, allowing us to model performing, composing, and listening in one program
- Teachers take away knowledge and skills that are reusable for their next cohort

Reflecting Phase: Final thoughts and future actions

The aim of this study was to understand how the value of a single day visiting artist program might improve by developing an equitable, collaborative relationship with the teachers and growing their musical self-efficacy.

“I think it was mostly facilitated by you, but I think the fact that we had the meetings before hand, and we got to bring things back into the classroom and get ourselves ready for the day, you know we did have contributions in that way.”

As the participant researcher, reflecting on the design of this study I realised that I had been misguided in thinking that I could pursue an equal teacher-artist partnership at the same time as growing teachers’ musical confidence. We found that we had to teach the teachers so they had something to teach their students, increasing their musical self-efficacy. However, to teach them we changed the nature of our relationship at that moment from collaborative to instructional, creating an imbalance of power. Had we/I framed the balance of power to include skills other than those relating to music, I might have seen that the teachers’ contribution lay in their strong knowledge of their students, and their ability to work with their students prior to the event. When discussing the partnership and each other’s contributions, both teachers and artists focused on who was responsible for implementing the idea, rather than its creation, so perhaps by that token, the balance of power never even shifted! The program definitely felt like a shared success that had been made possible through our discussions together in the pre-meetings.

“...you can basically use your body as an instrument and we didn't have any limitations in terms of resources... we could go ahead with the learning with what we had.”

“[The experience gave] me the capacity to understand that music is not just necessarily about musical notation but also includes just... feeling and creating soundscapes, and what can we use to create sound and how can we compose it, how can we put it together... just creating sound together is in itself music.”

In terms of musical self-efficacy, we seem to have been most successful in shifting attitudes about the nature of “quality music education”, and who can deliver it. We were really pleased to see changes in the teachers’ confidence with teaching and discussing musical material on the program delivery day. Had the original timeline of this project been followed, the impact of this project would have been observed several months after the delivery day. Future cycles of this research might find out more about the longevity of this project’s potential impact on the teachers and their relationship with music.

This project came to its conclusions based on the dynamic that existed between its unique set of participants. Though broad conclusions have been drawn, repeating this project with different teachers might result in different responses to Quart-Ed’s collaborative strategies. Teachers who have prior experience with other visiting artists may also be interesting participant teachers that are able to offer more critical feedback about the artists. Finally, Quart-Ed, by virtue of my participation, have learned so much from the action research process that a repeat of this project even with the same teachers next year would yield even more findings.



To my dear friends in Quart-Ed: Thank you for being the “yes” people whose mission to bring out the music in everyone was the foundation of this project.

To my new teacher friends: Every student and teacher we will meet after our collaboration thanks you for your contribution to our professional growth. Thank you for sharing your time, ideas and skills with us.

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