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About the Journal

Founded in 2013, the Journal of Teacher Action Research (ISSN: 2332-2233) is a peer-reviewed online journal indexed with EBSCO that seeks practical research that can be implemented in Pre-Kindergarten through Post-Secondary classrooms. The primary function of this journal is to provide classroom teachers and researchers a means for sharing classroom practices.

The journal accepts articles for peer-review that describe classroom practice which positively impacts student learning. We define teacher action research as teachers (at all levels) studying their practice and/or their students' learning in a methodical way in order to inform classroom practice. Articles submitted to the journal should demonstrate an action research focus with intent to improve the author's practice.

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“LET THE PEOPLE SING!” – ACTION RESEARCH EXPLORING TEACHERS’ MUSICAL CONFIDENCE WHEN ENGAGING LEARNERS IN ‘SINGING FOR WELLBEING’

Daphne Rickson

New Zealand School of Music - Te Kōkī, Victoria University of Wellington

Jo Atkinson

Marshland School

Dianne Reynolds

Waitākiri School

Robert Legg

Head of Music, Icknield Community College, United Kingdom

Abstract The examination and reconstruction of personal beliefs and change in practice that comes with action research can be intellectually and emotionally demanding. Action research exploring the process of “singing for wellbeing,” at a Christchurch primary school severely affected by the 2010-2011 earthquakes, uncovered the interesting dichotomy that teachers who were passionate about engaging children in singing were uncomfortable singing themselves. A critical action research orientation gave teachers impetus and time to discover and reflect on their personal histories, to engage with relevant literature, and to explore strategies to increase their confidence to engage in music activities with learners. Learning that musical confidence can be severely affected by the negative judgements of others, and that lack of teacher confidence in the arts is widespread (Bainger, 2010), validated their experiences, increased their self-understanding, and enabled them to sing with their learners with increasing confidence. Our findings reinforced the hypothesis that unpacking negative experiences can be almost as important in some cases as acquiring knowledge and skills in music.

Keywords: teacher action research, teachers, musical confidence, singing, wellbeing

Introduction

Waitākiri School in Christchurch opened in 2014, as part of the larger restructuring of Christchurch schools following the 2010-2011 earthquakes. At that time, our teachers began to engage learners in singing every day to develop and maintain a sense of community, and to promote enjoyment and readiness to learn. Despite experiencing significant ongoing challenges associated with a post-earthquake environment, well-being and engagement data indicated that learners continued to feel safe, valued and supported. Members of the school community joined university researchers in an action research project to examine the ways in which the singing was facilitated and sustained, and the perceived relationship between singing and well-being. We have reported these findings elsewhere (Rickson, Legg & Reynolds, 2018; Rickson, Reynolds & Legg, 2018), and in this paper focus on one aspect of our two-year action research project; specifically, our exploration of teachers' self-efficacy with regard to singing.

The school has been designed to promote collaborative teaching in flexible learning spaces. It is comprised of six learning studios; each designed to cater for approximately 115 children working with 4-5 teachers and one to two learning assistants. Our teacher-researchers were passionate about singing, strongly believed that singing was supporting the well-being of learners in our school, and were committed to maintaining daily singing in the learning studios. Yet the dialogic action research process allowed them to recognise that despite their passion for engaging learners in daily singing, six of the eight were not confident singers themselves. It seemed they were able to successfully facilitate the daily singing, despite having low self-efficacy with regard to music, by constructing a clear differentiation between 'singing for wellbeing' and 'music education', and promoting singing for well-being as fun activity which involved few expectations (Rickson, Legg & Reynolds, 2018). Engaging in what might be described as a 'spin-off cycle' (McNiff, 1988) our action research took a critical turn as we began to examine the processes that were inhibiting teachers' ability to singing freely with learners in the classroom, and elsewhere.

Literature Review

Singing can be helpful not only in fostering individual wellbeing in singers, but also in uniting groups (Ilari, Chen-Hafteck & Crawford, 2013). Participating in group singing leads to common purpose, developing cohesion within a group culture, through a common set of attitudes and behaviour (Drummond, 2012, p.305). The synchronisation of bodies and voices to a pulse, along with shared emotional expression, can be powerful in promoting group bonding (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010; Sutherland, 2015), and performing with others can give participants a sense of fulfilment, pride and accomplishment (Sutherland, 2015).

The vocalisations of babies and their caregivers is musical (Barrett, 2005; Trevarthen, 2002; Wiggins, 2015), and 'singing' emerges in infancy and continues to develop as children interact with others in their environments (Ilari et al., 2013; Welch, 2005). From the songs of children we can deduce that musical 'ability' is universal (Campbell, 2010; Ilari, Chen-

Hafteck & Crawford, 2013) and that, although we need to train in order to develop and exercise our potential, all people have the capacity to be musical (Lamont, 2011). That is, we can all enjoy music through listening, singing, and moving, regardless of whether we have had opportunities to take music lessons (Ilari et al., 2013; Thorn & Brasche, 2015). Moreover, singing does not require the use of external instruments or highly specialised teachers and is therefore a relatively low cost way of engaging children in music (Lamont, Daubney & Spruce, 2012).

Nevertheless, our ability to continue singing beyond preschool years is affected by how people around us view our singing (Welch, 2005). Our view of our musical selves is based on our beliefs taken from society, and in order to realize our inborn musical abilities we need to establish a strong musical identity that reinforces a belief that we *are* musical (Ilari, Chen-Hafteck & Crawford, 2013). Cultural associations guide our thinking about what we sound like when singing solo or with a group, and we learn to assess ourselves as ‘good’ or ‘not so good’ singers in according to our socio-cultural contexts (Ilari, Chen-Hafteck & Crawford, 2013; Welch, 2005). In Western cultures people are often identified as ‘singers’ or ‘non-singers’ and singing in public is considered to be a performance for the ‘talented’ singer (Ilari, Chen-Hafteck & Crawford, 2013; Welch, 2005). Consequently, people whose singing development has been held up in some way are often categorised as someone who ‘cannot sing’ (Sloboda, Wise, & Peretz, 2005) and as they grow older, many people refuse to sing in any circumstances, while others refuse to sing where they can be heard (West, 2009).

The views held by significant others, particularly music teachers, affect children’s self-concept in powerful ways (Abril, 2007; Turton & Durrant, 2002). Formative experiences which are negative or discouraging can have lifelong damaging effects; including the belief that it is too late to learn music as an adult (Pitts, 2015). A number of adults who are no longer musically active suggest their ‘lack of talent’ prevents them from engaging in music (Lamont, 2011; Sloboda, Wise & Peretz, 2005; Welch, 2005) and many of these people also report negative experiences at some point in their childhood music education, such as being told not to sing out loud in primary school choirs (Lamont, 2011; Welch, 2005). Lamont found that nearly 20% of 530 amateur adult music-makers from around the world had a relatively negative musical identity despite the fact that they were actively involved in making music (Lamont, 2011). Singing is a very personal act (Ilari, Chen-Hafteck & Crawford, 2013; Campbell, 2010). Criticism of singing ability therefore seems to have a stronger influence on an individual’s perception of their musical self than criticism of other music abilities such as instrumental skills, because it feels much more like a personal attack (Swain & Bodkin-Allen, 2014). When children are labelled as non-singers it can stigmatise them for life and stop them from singing in any context (Whidden, 2008).

Teachers in classrooms - even in early childhood settings, where children are constantly singing – often lack confidence in their own singing abilities (Heyning, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Swain & Bodkin-Allen 2017) and are more apprehensive about teaching music than most other school subjects (Hargreaves, Lamont, Marshall, & Tarrant, 2003; Heyning, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Thorn & Brasche, 2015) because of the complexity of the discipline and

their self-perceived lack of talent for music (Thorn & Brasche, 2015). Many teachers still believe singing is a 'gift' for the 'talented' and that only musically talented people can teach music in the classroom (Heyning, 2011). Further, teachers who may have low self-efficacy with regard to singing, are battling a crowded curriculum, are feeling over-scrutinised and losing confidence, and in our case managing significant challenges associated with living and working in a post-earthquake environment.

On the other hand, teachers are generally more confident to sing with children than with adults, and when they are prepared to have a go they can have a positive experience (Thorn and Brasche, 2015). Moreover, singing and other musical behaviours can improve with both formal and informal experience (Sloboda, Wise, & Peretz, 2005). The increasing popularity of inclusive community singing groups for adults for example, may be beginning to counter the impact that negative criticism and judgement had on many adults as children (Davidson 2011; Lamont, 2011).

Methodology

'Singing for Well-being' was a two-year Action Research (AR) project, funded by the New Zealand government Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) and approved by Victoria University of Wellington human ethics committee (Approval #22081). Action research in this context is a systematic, participatory approach, in which education practitioners themselves aim to promote positive change in their school community (Hine & Lavery, 2014; Mertler, 2010).

Participants. For this particular phase of our project, eight general classroom teachers, one specialist music teacher and one kapa haka tutor (Kapa haka is the term for Māori performing arts), collaborated with a core research team involving two researchers from Victoria University of Wellington and the Deputy Principal of Waitākiri School.

Method. Action research is dynamic in nature and is frequently described as a messy or chaotic experience (Nyanjom, 2017; Mikkelsen 2013). Researchers often begin with broad questions which are developed and refined through cycles of critical reflection and dialogue, which in turn lead to further or alternative action (Cardno, 2003). Each cycle involves planning, acting, reflecting and discussing results (Mertler, 2010), while engaging in continuous exploration of the relevant literature which informs, inspires and clarifies emerging findings. Cycles are not linear, but involve a "fluid, iterative, open, complex, and responsive process" (Cordeiro, Soares & Rittenmeyer, 2017, p.397). In a process of open dialogue, ideas that are tentatively articulated in reflection, can be examined more systematically in subsequent phases of active exploration. Action Research therefore offers opportunities to deal with a number of problems at the same time through the development of 'spin-off cycles' (McNiff, 1988).

This paper reports one such phase of our research, specifically our exploration of an early finding that despite their passion for supporting children to sing, six out of the eight classroom teachers who were co-researchers on this project were not confident singers themselves. Heyning (2011) argues that teachers who are confident and competent singers

are more likely to engage children in singing, and to do it successfully. Yet at our school, teachers who were decidedly lacking in singing confidence were able to introduce and sustain daily singing specifically to address the well-being of teachers and learners.

Research Question. We examined the above dichotomy by sharing our personal histories, engaging with the literature, and critically reflecting on the impact of our values and beliefs to answer the question “What are the processes that are inhibiting teachers’ ability to singing freely with learners in the classroom, and elsewhere; and how can singing confidence be increased.

Data gathering. Data were drawn from two semi-structured focus groups involving eight classroom teachers, individual interviews with four generalist teachers and the school’s specialist music teacher, and engagement with the literature. Focus groups and interviews were run in flexible ways, and initial prompts/questions were broad (e.g. ‘Can we talk about our experiences of facilitating singing in the classroom?’) to allow participants to discuss and to develop their own understanding of things that were important to them (Liamputtong, 2011). It was crucial to allow participants to continue talking, to shape the topic and conversation, and to introduce sometimes unexpected but relevant information that was meaningful and important to them (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Thus they were able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences, and to acquire in-depth knowledge about the things that they felt were important. In the later focus group and individual interviews we focused more on the change process using prompts such as ‘Tell me about any changes you have noticed with regard to your attitude or implementation of music with your learners?’ ‘How did those changes come about?’ ‘How important do you think these changes might be in terms of your future thinking/development as teachers who use music in the classroom?’

Data Analysis. Data were analysed by the first author using a process of inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and peer reviewed by the fourth author. The process involved:

- Transcribing the audio material from the focus groups and interviews verbatim
- Returning manuscripts to participants inviting their checking, editing and additional comments
- Listening to the audio, and reading the transcripts to become familiar with the data
- Identifying relevant chunks of transcript, and giving them initial codes
- Transferring the chunks of data, with initial codes in a separate column, to excel sheets
- Combining data by creating a master excel sheet, and sorting according to initial codes
- Reviewing the codes, and renaming, combining and developing new codes
- Sorting codes into broad categories
- Examining each category and applying secondary coding
- Sorting by secondary codes, and developing descriptions of codes

- Renaming, combining and developing new secondary codes as needed
- Sorting according to secondary codes and revising descriptions to develop themes (ideas generated by several participants), exceptions (ideas mentioned by only one person), concepts (combinations of ideas), and stories (examples from practice)
- Reproducing themes, exceptions and concepts in the form of findings
- Returning findings to participants for their comment/editing.

Results and Discussion

A critical action research orientation is employed when transformative action needs to be preceded by critical thinking and reflection (Kemmis, 2014). The process of examining personal experiences alongside theories reported in the literature was crucial to the personal transformation that teachers described. The paragraphs below therefore include actions and reflections interspersed with relevant literature.

Initial Problem: If music is for everyone why do we feel we are not musical? We began our research with the assumption that musicality is innate. Teachers already agreed that music is for everyone, not just an 'elite' few, and that singing is an 'equalising', 'accessible' and highly motivating activity. We learnt from the literature that infants engage in musical interaction with caregivers (Barrett, 2005; Trevarthen, 2002; Wiggins, 2015); and young children, across cultures, engage in musical play (Campbell, 2010; Wiggins, 2015). Children are initiators of musical activities (Burnard, 2013), musical ideas (Wiggins, 2007) and musical innovations (Marsh, 2009) and singing is a natural, spontaneous, means of communication for them (Bodkin-Allen, 2009; Campbell, 2010). Yet despite our understanding that musicianship is innate, six of our eight general classroom teacher/researchers variously claimed they were 'not musicians', 'not musical', or they 'couldn't sing'.

I wouldn't know if I was singing a note correctly or not. I don't have that kind of ear.
Barbara, Individual Interview

Action: Reflecting on one's beliefs. Jo, one of our studio teachers, recognised she had a fear of singing, which stemmed from being told, "You don't sing very well", as a child. She described becoming "frightened of music", "putting up a wall" and deciding, "Right then!", she was not going to do it anymore. At teachers college, she was required to learn the recorder and guitar, and felt shut down even further by tutors who seemed to lack passion for their subject. Perhaps more importantly she experienced her music module as highly judgemental. She was shocked when one of her tutors told her not to sing but to "hum along" to what she describes as her "dreadful music making". On the other hand, Jo admits that she entered teacher's college already believing music was an area she was not good at, and that improvement would be unlikely. Yet she loves listening to music, singing in private, dancing, and listening to children singing. She even described feeling "desperate to sing" but still "won't let (her) voice come out" if other people are around.

Sue too, suggested she loves singing and “sings loud, in private.” When we began our research Sue described feeling “a bit out of my depth here”. She explained:

I learnt piano as a child, but I’m just private with music. I had a really bad experience actually when I trained initially as a kindergarten teacher. We all sat together in one group and we all had to sing – then it was pointed out to us everything that we did wrong. And ever since that point, when I was probably about 18-19, I don’t sing – unless I’m singing with whole lot of other people. ...I remember it all.

Sue, focus group contribution

Action: Professional development workshops. It was clear that our teachers were enthusiastic about facilitating daily singing for well-being, yet most had little confidence in their ability to sing or to teach children to sing. We learnt that preservice and professional development programmes can be successful in increasing teachers’ confidence and competence to teach music (Heyning, 2010; Pascoe, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2013; Sinclair, Watkins & Jeanerett, 2015). For example, skill and confidence can be enhanced when teachers are involved in weekly one hour singing sessions with children (Heyning; 2010), staff singing groups (Nyland, Ferris & Deans; 2010), and collaboration with mentors (Bainger, 2010; Jeanerett & Stevens-Ballenger, 2013). Our team therefore agreed that the fourth author, (a university lecturer, researcher, and music educator) and the first author, (a music therapy lecturer) would facilitate a workshop which focused on participatory vocal/movement activities that teachers might be able to facilitate in the studio learning environments.

Several teachers felt uncomfortable engaging in the exercises that were offered (as indicated in quotes below), and rejected the offer of further professional development of this type. Others built on it by attending a teachers’ workshop in the community that the fourth author was facilitating. Overall however, ‘direct learning’ such as that offered through the workshop, was not as successful in supporting our teachers as the process of documenting, examining and reflecting on the ways in which they were engaging children in music in the classroom.

The skill development comes with enjoyment over time. As part of the research process we tried some skill-based exercises that took us back to childhood experiences that some of us were not ready for – we were transported to feelings that “you can’t do this.” However from this point in time – without any pressure – teachers decided to give their children some different musical opportunities. A teacher from each team went to a music education workshop. They enjoyed that opportunity and it too sowed a little seed that they were able to go away and think about. Eventually one team worked with a group of boys on a body percussion piece that they performed; another on a drumming piece; and they have given children other ‘new’ musical experiences too. They did that because the children were really interested and motivated, and the children and teachers all learnt. And while these activities were fun, they would also have made an important contribution to the children’s music education.

Dianna, individual interview

Action: Facing and challenging fears through a collaborative process of critical reflection. Jo and Sue's histories provide convincing evidence that early negative interactions with others significantly impacted on their singing confidence. Their stories reinforce the belief that lack of singing confidence can be related to negative experiences in childhood or adolescence; including public humiliation in front of classmates, or being asked to mouth the words instead of singing (Bainger, 2009; Bodkin, 1999; Swain & Bodkin-Allen, 2014).

However, the process of critically reflecting on their experiences enabled Jo and Sue to face and to challenge their fears. Jo recognised that learners would not judge her singing as she might have previously anticipated. She was aware before we began our research that she didn't sing in front of the children, but believed it wasn't a problem. The research process helped her re-evaluate.

"(I was thinking initially) 'don't change my ideas. This is how I have to be'. But I feel like I have actually owned up to that and thought, 'Oh actually you are right'".

Jo, interview

As she began to look more closely at her role in facilitating singing for wellbeing, Jo began to understand the importance of modelling what she expects from the children. She has "stepped out of her comfort zone", to "behave differently toward the singing... (and is now) bouncing and smiling and the pointing to the words... in a good way". Jo began to recognise that her love of music and dance freed her to engage passionately during music activities and was determined that she would not pass her fear of singing on to the children.

"I felt (the research was telling us) that we can't be a good teachers of singing if we feel frightened of singing ourselves, in front of a crowd. And, and I felt quite offended by that at the end of the (first) year. (But) I thought 'Hang on a minute, I love bopping around. That's my 'thing', you know. And I love to sing in the car by myself. And I've learnt through this process how to sing in front (of others). And I'll sing in front of the children.

Jo, focus group contribution

Action: Drawing on the support of colleagues. Jo also noticed that some of her colleagues who also felt they "don't sing well" continued to sing with the children. The ways in which more confident teachers have been modelling 'courage' and supporting and motivating each other to lead and participate in singing, has increased Jo's comfort with singing.

I thought working as a team was important; because, I wouldn't have enjoyed it as much, if I was participating on my own in my own little classroom. And I think watching these guys (other teachers) who are obviously musical, and Sue expressing early on that she wasn't very comfortable made me feel a little bit better that I wasn't alone. And then I watched Sue stepping out of her comfort zone. At the end of the year we did a performance which I don't think we would normally have done... and it was fantastic.

Jo, focus group contribution

Jo has begun to dance in the studios with other staff, while children are singing, and thinks it is great fun. She is aware that when children see teachers enjoying themselves they sing louder and they laugh while they are singing. The enjoyment promotes wellbeing. Jo also believed the higher number of children in learning studio environments, compared with

regular classrooms, made a significant positive difference to her experience of facilitating singing.

"If the singing is not very loud, nobody sings up. It's just really quiet, which (isn't) actually that enjoyable... (On the other hand) the louder they get the louder they get and the louder they get. ...And the sound of 120 children ...blows me away 'cos I love to listen to children sing".

Jo, individual interview

It is possible that Jo's preference for loudness might have been related to her fear of being heard, and the 'safety' she perceives when 'hiding' in a big group. She suggested when children are in a smaller group they might want to sing, but feel unable to because "(when) no-one else is singing ...I can't. I have to go". 'Having to go' or 'running away' seems to be a metaphor for Jo's fear of music and her childhood decision that she was not going to do it anymore. More recently, Jo tried to learn the drums from another teacher but stopped because she felt she "really wasn't very good".

It's a slow process because it's my fear too to get over. I still want those children to sing. I would never sort of, walk around as though (it's not a good thing) that people will hear you. I'd never put that onto children. So does how we feel about (our) singing impact on the singing and wellbeing of our children? I think we play a role. If we are frightened of something we ensure that those children aren't, you know. We take more of advanced thinking to make sure that they're not feeling the way I do. ...A lot of teaching is like that isn't it? You've got a role that you're playing".

Jo, individual interview

Action: Promoting positive participation. Teacher self- efficacy is dependent on both confidence and competence. Teachers' beliefs about their competence, their school context, and the pressures they experience with regard to the curriculum, as well as their beliefs regarding the benefits of the arts for learners, can be highly influential in their abilities to teach music effectively (Garvis & Pendegast, 2010). We have already suggested that what teachers believe about their capacity for initiating and implementing musical ideas can underpin or impede their potential to engage in further music education (Wiggins, 2015). However, in our case, while singing confidence and confidence to teach music was low, teachers were extremely confident in their abilities to successfully facilitate singing for well-being, i.e. singing for fun. This was crucial, because if an experience is perceived to be successful, self-efficacy is raised, and if it is perceived to be a failure, self-efficacy is lowered (Garvis, Twigg & Pendegast, 2011).

Teachers also stressed the importance of *children* believing they can be successful at singing in order to gain a sense of achievement, and the motivation to continue. However they suggested 'success' is about children being able to participate in their own way (e.g. listening, moving, as well as or instead of singing). They argued strongly that 'technical music learning' was not appropriate in the context of singing for well-being; and that singing for well-being should not be 'taught'; rather it should just be "pure spontaneous enjoyment" (Rickson, Legg & Reynolds, 2018). This was important because it contributed to a growing body of knowledge that suggests when aiming for psychosocial well-being

benefits, activities that focus on expression and fun should be encouraged to enable learners to experience music as engaging, enjoyable and useful in terms of communicating feelings (Crooke & McFerran, 2014).

On the other hand we also concluded that by focusing on positive participation rather than skill-based learning, the potential exists for singing in the classroom to contribute positively to both education and well-being agendas (Rickson, Legg & Reynolds, 2018), and the development of lifelong musical learning (Higgins, 2015).

I was in a choir all the way through primary school but I actually don't think of myself as a very good singer. I don't think I sing in tune, but that doesn't stop me singing because I absolutely love it! And I don't think that's a bad thing, in front of the kids, if you can't sing that well then it's always good to show that.

Carmen, focus group contribution

The singing has offered opportunities for all kids to be involved as active participants, the music we did at the end of last year was similarly giving those kids a go – those who might not normally be perceived as being musical, and giving them a purpose, making it fun. And though we weren't teaching them notation and those sorts of things, I was using musical terms like 4/4 and they were learning rhythms and beats so they were still learning those concepts in a fun, purposeful way.

Matt, focus group contribution

(The research process) has grown my appreciation of the music that the kids are involved with. ...To see the enjoyment they've got from some of those older songs, and the engagement, whereas we would be inclined to go with what the kids choose thinking that that's what's going to give them the most enjoyment. But it's not actually been that way and it's broadened their musical appreciation as well. ... What helped was knowing the process that they would be going through, and the feelings that they would go through. So we worked through those things as we became more confident.

Sue, focus group contribution

Our experiences of having conversations around singing for wellbeing – just the pure enjoyment of it – got mixed up with thinking that music education is completely different. But we know we can enjoy singalongs and still take opportunities to increase our enjoyment and wellbeing by taking the singing to another level with new songs that we might not always sing, or with adding harmonies and so on. We don't need to judge people who don't go to that next level, but taking those opportunities can enhance the positive responses that singing can evoke. It might be the difference between happiness and 'goose bumps' for example.

Dianna, individual interview

Reflection: Understanding the action research process. The emphasis our teachers put on taking a 'non-judgemental' and 'non-pressurizing' approach to singing for well-being might also be related to their personal experiences of feeling pressurized to sing, and/or being judged to be inadequate. People who label themselves 'non-singers' are anxious about

singing, often resist it in fear of being judged (Abril, 2007; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Sloboda, 2005). Moreover, Jo argued that people have high expectations of teachers generally; they are always being 'judged', and judged on the performance of others, and "cannot put a toe out of line". She is therefore "always worried about whether (she) is good enough". However, the action research process enabled individual teachers in our study not only to gradually understand various aspects of their facilitation of singing, including the ways in which their histories have impacted on their relationship with singing, but also to make continuous progress in developing their strengths as reflective practitioners.

The action research has been enjoyable overall, because it has allowed us to have thinking time, to hear each other's stories, and to hear teachers' learning. It has prompted people to share personal experiences, early experiences, not just their own experiences of teaching music. And some of our conversations have been difficult. But we were able to uncover some long held beliefs that teachers were carrying about music, and this was important.... It was helpful to reflect on some of my own music experiences at school and to realise why I hold some of the beliefs that I now do now. For example, I never got into the choirs at high school because I was 'never good enough', but I want children to be able to have that experience now, so I make sure that anyone can come and sing at choir.

Dianna, individual interview

Jo suggests the action research process enabled her to sing with her learners by taking a cognitive approach (telling herself it was part of her professional role to do this), acknowledging her love of music, and drawing on the support (particularly modelling) of colleagues. All members of the school community were already working together to achieve a common purpose and teachers had developed a strong culture of collaboration (Fullan, 1999). Our teachers' shared communication and reflection on their experiences enabled them to safely challenge their beliefs, to gain further self-understanding, and to take small steps towards improving their singing confidence, by allowing them to establish a learning community specifically to examine their daily singing practices.

When we began our action research, we would have been making assumptions about what team members were thinking and feeling. We began singing brain breaks with a neurological focus; knowing that singing would be something that would stimulate other areas of the brain and help children to be ready for learning. That's why we did what we did. The teams came on board because they were interested in the singing, they could see the positive benefits that singing had for the children – but without realising how much self-reflection they would end up doing themselves. During this process, we have looked not only at how we facilitate the singing, or teach music, but also at ourselves – and this is more than we would have anticipated when we started on this journey. The action research process helped us to change.

Dianna, individual interview

Change takes time to be realized, and works best when it is not imposed (Makoelle, 2014). Our teachers already had substantial change imposed on them as a result of significant and traumatic events, and we were aware that we were working in a sensitive setting which

demanding we take care not to cause unnecessary distress (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Mutch, 2015). It was crucial that they be allowed to think on their own about change rather than having change imposed on them (Richards et al. 2001). As Jo suggests, “people need gentle encouragement and support in order to engage with music in their own time and at their own pace”. Action research does not always lead to dramatic changes in practice, or even make a significant contribution to a body of knowledge. Rather, individual practices and practitioners are changed as participants engage in inquiry in which connections are made – through critical reflection – between personal experiences, theory and their professional practice. Reflecting deeply is something teachers rarely have regular time for.

The action research made us do it. We might have slackened off - (Another teacher cuts in: “We had to think about it more”) - Yes, we had to think about it more because we were part of something that was bigger than us, we don’t like letting people down so we put our best foot forward. So it made us think laterally too.
Sue, focus group contribution

By thinking and learning about their classroom singing practices, and the beliefs and values that underpin them, our teachers may have become more confident in their ability to put theory into practice across a wider range of curriculum activities. They have been challenged to examine their own beliefs and values, have become more reflective, analytical, and critical, and will be able to expand their knowledge and skills as researchers and as empowered professionals who can self-monitor more effectively, in an ongoing way.

Teachers do not want to stagnate, we don’t want to stand still; we want to challenge ourselves all the time. But we’ve been through a great deal of change at Waitākiri School both before and during the period of this research – including developing our collaborative teaching and learning approach. Some of the change has been externally imposed, and some of it was internally imposed, as well as teachers engaging in self-challenge. Making and maintaining positive connections with others in our school community has been extremely important. The research enabled us to connect with those around us because we were all singing and working on the action research together.
Dianna, individual interview

Conclusion

This single case study focuses on a school where teachers chose to engage learners in daily singing to support their well-being in a traumatic post-earthquake environment. While reflecting on the work, several teachers recognised that they were passionate about engaging children in singing yet were uncomfortable singing themselves. An action research process gave them time and space to reflect on their personal histories, to consider how their musical confidence had been affected by the negative judgements of others, and to recognise that their experiences were not unique. In this way their experiences and feelings were validated.

The success of teacher professional development depends not only on their ability to reflect on and develop their conceptualizations of knowledge, learning and teaching practices (Thorn & Brasche, 2015) but also on their willingness to challenge problematic beliefs and develop new understandings (Nyberg, 2015). Nyberg goes on to say that research on professional development within arts education has found that practitioners are reluctant to implement change suggested not only by authorities and policy makers but also by practitioners; and that thought patterns, as well as behaviour, needs to change (Neyberg, 2015). However, examining and reconstructing personal beliefs can be intellectually and emotionally demanding. Teachers participating in the Singing for Wellbeing project described journeys of listening, rebelling, gaining self-acceptance and acceptance from others; and of watching, listening, gaining confidence, participating, increasing confidence and participating further. Thus they deemed the work worthwhile.

The key to worthwhile teacher-conducted action research rests in the questions addressed by the project and the extent to which the results are meaningful and important to the teachers - and not necessarily in the means by which those results are realized (Mertler, 2010). In our case the research process helped teachers gain a deeper sense of empathy with others in the school community, and they were able to use this empathy to support learners. They felt that the research process supported their efforts to collaborate as those who were more confident or competent with particular aspects of the project were able to model and support others; i.e. they learnt from each other. Most importantly, their close observations of children left them inspired by the ways in which the learners managed themselves in extremely difficult circumstances, and how singing, along with physical movement and humour, appeared to support their well-being. We have included a video put together by learners and teachers which brings together these three factors and demonstrates how they supported well-being in our community (<https://youtu.be/GkOr7xq36EM>).

Despite their low self-efficacy with regard to singing and teaching music, our teachers were able to ensure that singing programmes remained accessible and enjoyable – and ‘successful’ in the well-being context. Our findings suggest that even with poor self-efficacy, teachers are able to engage learners in singing by taking the focus away from music learning. Similarly early childhood teachers in Swain & Bodkin-Allen’s (2014) study who lacked confidence and considered themselves ‘tone deaf’ and unmusical, also reported enjoying or even loving singing, and were willing to participate in singing activities. However, while our findings suggest that unpacking negative experiences can be almost as important in some cases as acquiring knowledge and skills in music (Bainger, 2010) we would also argue that more needs to be done to ensure that teachers – and indeed all people - are able to be confident in using their voices to sing.

“Journeying on a wider path allows us to move with a more diverse group of fellow travellers who shape our journey and widen our perspectives”.

(Chapman, 2015, p. 27)

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About the Authors

Daphne Rickson, Ph.D., is a Senior Lecturer in music therapy at the New Zealand School of Music - Te Kōkī, Victoria University of Wellington. As a music therapy practitioner she has over twenty years of experience working with learners who have diverse needs, in a range of special schools and mainstream settings. She has particular interest and experience in the use of collaborative research approaches, including participatory action research. Email: daphne.rickson@vuw.ac.nz.

Jo Atkinson is an experienced classroom teacher, and currently Team Leader (Korimako Hub, Year 5-6) at Marshland School. Email: atkinson@marshland.school.nz.

Dianna Reynolds is an experienced classroom teacher, music specialist, and current Deputy Principal at Waitākiri School. Email: dianna.reynolds@waitakiri.school.nz.

Robert Legg, Ed.D., studied music and education at Bristol, Oxford and Durham universities in the United Kingdom, and at McGill University in Canada. He plays the cello and the piano, and is active as a teacher, researcher, conductor and accompanist. His widely performed arrangements and award-winning original compositions include part-songs, dramatic cantatas and carols, as well as music for orchestra and string ensembles. Robert has worked extensively in schools and universities in England, New Zealand and France. His academic writing appears in journals such as Music Education Research, Psychology of Music, Research in Education and The Curriculum Journal while his book chapters, journalism and reviews can be found in many professional periodicals. Email: robertjlegg@gmail.com.

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