

The role of professional learning in reducing isolation experienced by classroom music teachers

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Abstract

There is substantial evidence in the literature to suggest that professional isolation is a significant problem for music teachers. This paper reports on the results of a survey regarding the professional learning of classroom music teachers (n=53) from Foundation (also known as Preparatory, Reception or Kindergarten) to Year Nine. Teachers who participated in the survey responded to questions regarding their participation in professional development, their current and desired means of participating in professional dialogue with other music teachers, and their use of teaching and planning resources. The study found that further consideration of strategies to relieve professional isolation of music teachers is needed. The findings of the study align ideas presented in the literature, identifying the most affective strategies of alleviating professional isolation as the need to address the lack of discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge, the need for effective professional development strategies, and the importance of professional networks.

Key words: Classroom music education, teacher professional development, professional isolation.

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Introduction

It has been recognised that the provision of ongoing curriculum supports, such as resources and professional development, assists classroom music teachers in their planning and teaching (Ballantyne, 2006; Hartwig & Barton, 2004; Heinrich, 2012; Kelly, 2005). Further, connecting with other music teachers is considered to be essential in alleviating professional isolation (Krueger, 1999; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Considering these ideas is particularly timely as music teachers across Australia move towards implementing The Australian Curriculum: The

Arts (ACARA, 2013), arguably an opportunity for music teachers to engage and communicate on a national scale. Hartwig and Barton (2004) contend that the success of implementing a new curriculum rests with the curriculum support provided for teachers with the new document. The Music Council of Australia (MCA) review of the draft document in October 2012 outlined that the success of this new national curriculum would be dependent on the support given to teachers through the implementation of resources aligned with the syllabus document (Letts et al., 2012). Recent research indicates that equality of access

to classroom music programs across Australia will not be possible without the provisions of increased funding for programs and training more music specialist teachers (Heinrich, 2012). This study provides an exploration of teachers' perceptions of their professional learning needs and identifies potential areas of support that inform the implementation of this curriculum.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a report on a recent survey of Foundation to Year 9 classroom music teachers regarding their professional learning. The project sought to explore music teachers' perceptions of valuable professional learning. It became apparent that the desire to alleviate feelings of isolation by connecting with other teachers was significant for the teachers who participated in the study. In this paper, we begin by describing the existing literature on professional isolation more broadly, before focussing specifically on how this applies to classroom music teachers. We then discuss a number of factors identified in the literature as contributing to music teachers' feelings of isolation: a lack of discipline-specific knowledge and training, a need for access to effective professional development, and limited opportunities to engage in professional conversations with colleagues. The scope and methodology of the project is then described. Next, we present the findings of the questionnaire, connecting the teachers' responses with the themes from the literature. We conclude by identifying some potential future directions that may assist in solving the problem of professional isolation of music teachers.

Literature Review

Professional isolation of teachers

The concept of professional isolation is neither new, nor restricted to the teaching area of music, with Lortie identifying concerning trends of teacher isolation as early as 1975. While all teachers are at risk of potential isolation, music teachers are particularly vulnerable, due to the

specialisation of the discipline of music, and the fact that often there may only be one music teacher at each school (Krueger, 1999; Ballantyne, 2006). Internationally, teacher numbers have decreased over the past decade (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2012). Frank (2009) identifies professional isolation as being the main cause in increased teacher attrition and describes this form of isolation as becoming a growing phenomenon. In addition, researchers have identified that teacher isolation hinders the achievement of curriculum outcomes (Rothberg, 1986). Rothberg notes that the collaboration of teachers not only assists the achievement of curriculum outcomes, but when it does not occur, has negative flow-on effects to classroom and school music programmes (Rothberg, 1986), further highlighting the need to address teachers' feelings of isolation by providing appropriate support. This section describes three types of isolation that teachers experience, and then the major contributing factors to teacher isolation.

Types of Teacher Isolation

Egg-crate isolation

Lortie (1975) describes the lack of opportunities to observe other teachers going about their work as "egg-crate" isolation. Teachers spend most of their working days in a classroom with students. The nature of their role means that unlike many other professions, they do not tend to observe their colleagues work. Although teachers work in close proximity to other teachers, they often lack the opportunity to interact with colleagues, share resources, opinions on curriculum developments, their failures and successes (Davis, 1987). The physical separation that teachers experience routinely from their colleagues, means that they are more likely to develop the feeling that they are in fact isolated, amidst their work demands (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Krueger (1999) elaborates on the experience of egg-crate isolation as experienced by early career teachers.

Krueger describes this sense of physical isolation as being an unfamiliar experience for early career teachers who have emerged from tertiary studies where they have previously been surrounded with their peers and now find themselves isolated professionally in a classroom with students.

Psychological isolation

Hargreaves (2001) contends that teaching is an emotional practice, and that to improve the quality of teaching, we not only need to improve what teachers know and do, but also the emotions experienced by teachers. Further, Hargreaves suggests that human nature dictates “people like to be liked” (p. 512). It is therefore not surprising that teachers habitually look towards their colleagues for recognition and support. Rogers and Babinski (2002) concur, purporting that teachers’ levels of stress are increased when they are not given feedback regarding their practice. To counter psychological isolation, Tellez (1992) suggests that it is crucial to establish communities of practice as a “social network to alleviate stress and disorganisation” (p. 12).

Adaptive isolation: Feelings of being overwhelmed when encountering new requirements

Ballantyne (2007) describes the combination of physical isolation and the shock of the work demands experienced by early career teachers as contributors to praxis shock (Ballantyne, 2007). The participants in Ballantyne’s study identified that, in addition to physical barriers experienced by all teachers, rigorous timetables, additional extra-curricular groups and ensembles, as well as general feelings of un-preparedness, were key factors in their feelings of teacher isolation (Ballantyne, 2007). Scheib’s (2006) findings are consistent with Ballantyne’s; however also indicate inconsistent administration support as another contributing factor to professional isolation. The rigorous demands placed on music teachers in particular, place these professionals

at a higher risk of burn out than teachers across other academic areas (Kelly, 1999).

Contributors to teacher isolation Lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills

Ballantyne (2004, 2007) attributes one of the key factors of isolation in early career music teachers to be a lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills. In a study conducted by Russell-Bowie (1993), it was identified that tertiary training was inadequate at providing primary music teachers with appropriate training. Ballantyne asserts that the lack of preparedness to teach, combined with the reality of early career teaching, leaves music teachers with a sense of being “thrown in the deep end”. Without the pedagogical support of colleagues, often because they are the only music teacher in the school or even the region, this lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills leads to a feeling of professional isolation (Ballantyne, 2007, p.184).

Research conducted by Russell-Bowie (1999) reports that generalist class teachers experience difficulty in providing effective music education for their students. Jeanneret (2006) outlines, that while Queensland has made primary music specialist teachers available to schools for many years, this is not legislated or funded in other states, resulting in disparate quality of music education between states. Although reports and recommendations into supplying schools with primary music specialists have been produced over the past 40 years, without State and Territory legislation to enforce this activity, specialist teachers have only been sporadically employed in other areas of Australia (Russell-Bowie, 1993). Higher socio-economic areas have higher levels of percentages of their students involved in instrumental ensembles, and general classroom teachers in urban areas give higher priority to music programs than their counterparts teacher in rural areas, the same finding was identified with regards to music specific resources (Russell-Bowie, 1993).

Need for access to professional development

The importance of effective professional development, as well as support resources for curriculum documents and planning, cannot be overlooked in providing early-career teachers with resources for planning, scaffolding, structure and content progression (Garvis, 2012). Research indicates that a critical influence in the quality of a classroom music program is a teacher who is both 'skilled and confident' (Chen & Chang, 2006; Elliot, 2006; Gharavi, 1993; Temmerman, 2006). As the literature presents, effective professional development assists not only in developing discipline specific knowledge, but also in improving teacher confidence.

Russell-Bowie (1999) notes that generalist class teachers find working with a specialist music teacher at their school or class to be effective in guiding them to effectively teach classroom music lessons. This finding can be compared with Krueger's study in 1999 as it continued to offer suggestions that the bulk of their teaching resources were derived from their rare encounters with other experienced music teachers (Krueger, 1999). Krueger also draws conclusions that teachers are more able to actually utilise repertoire and resources that have been demonstrated to them by another music teacher. Benson (2008), highlights the effectiveness of team teaching for early music teachers as an effective strategy to acquire music pedagogy skills. This can be utilised as a means for not only acquiring new skills, but also combatting the feelings of teacher isolation, and personal repertoire and resource development.

Professional conversations and network building

For nearly three decades, researchers have studied the effectiveness of teachers sharing resources (Little, 1982; 1986). Liebermann and Mace (2010) note that Little's findings indicated

that teachers who not only work together sharing resources and teaching strategies, not only prevent the feeling of teacher isolation, however also make a larger commitment to continue learning as they teach, and hence improving and building on their teaching skills. This is also supported by findings in Krueger's interviews with study participants when discussing mentorship programs in 1999.

Sindberg and Lipscomb (2005) concluded in their study of music teacher professional isolation, that the collaboration and sharing with other music teachers proved to be a leading method in combating professional isolation. This finding was also shared by Krueger (1999) who described the collaboration of music teachers, specifically with other music specialist teachers, as developing teacher confidence and while collaborating teachers to acquired resources and new teaching approaches (Krueger, 1999). With direct reference to music teacher isolation, Gruenhagen concludes that professional conversations between music specialists are not only effective in reducing feelings of professional isolation, but also in improving the quality of Australian music education programs (Gruenhagen, 2012).

Undoubtedly, teachers with vast experience may be better equipped with a much larger song file, and more pedagogical approaches to teaching specific elements of music than early music teachers. Hesterman (2012) makes the point of defining that good teaching practices come from not only teachers equipped with expertise in the area of music, but those who commit to becoming life long learners. The value of imparting one's resources with their colleagues, while also consistently seeking new resources to use within their own teaching is made very clear. While the inequalities within music education in Australia exist and the acknowledgment that providing quality music programs for all stand as a means to diminish these inequalities, the need for greater music-specific curriculum support materials and advice is obvious (DEST, 2005).

When discussing teacher isolation, Kelly (2005) concludes that the provisions of teacher mentoring programs assist in nurturing new teachers while retaining more experienced teachers in the field as mentors. Kelly (2005) also concludes that such programs that involve the peer collaboration of teachers assists in reducing teacher isolation overall, and inspires new teachers into the education system. Krueger (1999) adds that experienced music specialist teachers often encounter the feelings of isolation as they lack the opportunities to discuss their teaching approaches with other music trained teaching staff at their school. Krueger states that enabling teachers to collaborate and discuss their teaching approaches, specifically other music specialists teachers rather than general classroom teachers, assists in voiding these feelings of isolation and improves teacher confidence, resource attainment and the building of a personal repertoire library.

Methodology

Project design

The review of literature inspired the following research questions:

1. What value do teachers place on methods of professional learning:
 - professional development,
 - professional dialogue with mentors and colleagues, and
 - teaching and planning resources?
2. How might these ways of professional learning reduce teachers' feelings of isolation?

This paper reports on the first question, which was addressed through an online questionnaire.¹ The questionnaire contained forty questions, with a combination of multiple choice, ranking orders,

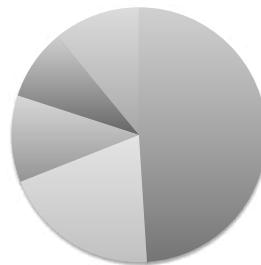
and open-answer questions designed around the four main themes presented in the literature: contributors of teacher isolation, pedagogical knowledge, skills and training, access to professional development and professional conversations and network building.

Participants

Fifty-three Prep (Foundation) to Year 9 classroom music teachers participated in the study. 83 percent of the participants were female, and 17 percent were male. Ninety-one percent of participants were teaching classroom music in Queensland, with other participants located in Tasmania, New South Wales and Western Australia. Within the participant group, data was recorded for the populations of the where the participants' schools were located. Of the participants, only 49 percent of identified themselves as living in a large metropolitan area, 21 percent indicated that they taught in a large regional town, 12 percent selected medium sized town, 10 percent selected a small regional town and 10 percent selected a small rural community.

Of the participant group, 67 percent identified the school that they were currently teaching at

Figure 1: Geographical location of participants' schools (Question 10).



- Large metropolitan area (city)
- Large regional town (pop. of >80k)
- Medium regional town (pop. of 20k-80k)
- Small regional town (pop. of 10k-20k)
- Small rural community (pop. <10k)

1. A follow-up study explored the second question through more in-depth qualitative methods. The reports of this study can be found in Author and Author (forthcoming).

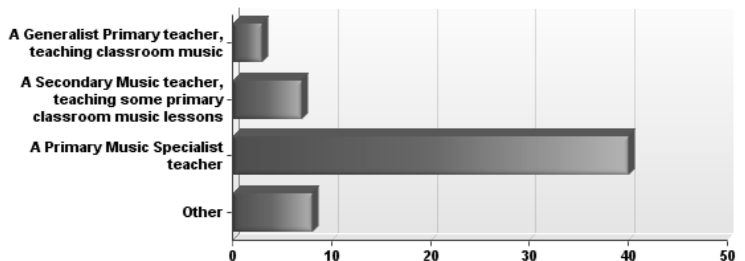
as a State School. This is significant because it will be mandatory for state schools to implement the new national curriculum as directed. Despite the literature identifying a problem with the level of music specialists' training, 69 percent of participants indicated that they had tertiary training as a Primary Music Specialist teacher. The remaining participants included 5 percent of general trained classroom teachers currently teaching primary music, 12 percent were secondary trained music teachers teaching primary music, and the remaining 14 percent that selected were 'other' consisted of instrumental or performing arts trained teachers.

Participants were recruited through mailing lists, social media, personal networks and announcements at professional development events. Participants were encouraged to share the link via email with their professional networks including current work colleagues, and mailing lists that they use.

Data Collection and analysis

Data was collected through the online questionnaire. Questions were based around the themes identified in the research questions: their perceptions of professional development, their perceptions of the value of professional conversations and networks, and their current use of resources. A descriptive statistical analysis was undertaken. For each survey question, the total number of responses, mean value, minimum value, and maximum value were calculated.

Figure 2: Participants' descriptions of their tertiary training.



The responses from the survey were correlated and compared with the themes identified in the literature and relevant demographic and geographical data. Open-ended responses were coded using content analysis, with the findings compared with the existing literature.

Findings

What value do teachers place on methods of professional learning? Professional development

Results in the online survey indicate that teachers are currently actively seeking postgraduate professional development short-courses as a direct means to guide them, and/or assist them with Foundation to Year 9 classroom music pedagogical approaches. Survey results indicate a high value currently placed on this mode of professional learning by teachers. Participant 6 made the following comment when asked why he sought out professional development:

Tertiary training was not actually all that useful in preparing for the classroom. The post tertiary courses, PD sessions, summer schools and learning directly from other practicing teachers that is of the most value and directly related to the reality of the classroom music-teaching situation. (Question 16, Participant 6).

I didn't have adequate training in my tertiary education. The state of the field was completely different to what I learned at uni. I have since pursued professional development and have

received much more support with planning and teaching classroom music. I'm a much more able and confident teacher because of that. (Question 16, Participant 3)

Despite the fact that only 5 percent of participants in the study did not have tertiary music studies as part of their teacher preparation program, 30 percent of the total number of participants in the study further indicated that they felt their tertiary studies had not adequately prepared them for Foundation – Year 9 classroom music teaching.

Participants were asked to elaborate on their response to the adequateness of their tertiary studies.

I had no training at university at all. It was only through going to my own PDs and Summer schools that I learnt what to do. (Question 16, Participant 2)

My tertiary training did not prepare me at all for the realities of planning a prep to seven music program. Within my organisation (EQ) there is no scope for any form of planning or preparation support. Increasing administration burdens are also eating in to the little planning time we may have. (Question 16, Participant 28)

University gave me very, very little preparation for teaching classroom music. I did an intensive ten-week in-service course, run by Education Queensland. This has formed the foundation and essence of my pedagogy and practice as a music specialist. I would have been lost without it. (Question 16, Participant 20)

The responses of the participants link closely to the preceding literature review where it was presented that music teachers, particularly in their early years of teaching, felt underprepared to teach and unsupported in their role (Ballantyne, 2004 & 2007). This study highlights the importance of in-service professional development as an important mode of professional learning for music teachers. The emphasis of developing pedagogical approaches, or as previously described by a

participant in the study as ‘what to do’, is a significant outcome.

The study examined if teachers would like to attend more professional development than they are currently attending. In general, it was found that most teachers would currently like to attend more professional development, with 74 percent of participants in the study indicating this. An examination of the reasons for the desire to attend more professional development revealed the following findings:

This study also questioned what teachers currently found the benefits of attending professional development were. In this question, teachers were asked to select responses that shared their thoughts of the ‘actual benefits of attending professional development’. Participants were able to select more than one benefit in this multiple response question.

Upon correlation of figures 2 and 3, it is evident that teachers’ desired outcomes of attending professional development differ from what they currently perceive as the actual benefits of attending. In both cases, the underlying desire and outcome of professional development is the development of curriculum supports and resources. It is apparent that a flow-on effect of attending professional development is a sudden importance placed on professional networks by the participants in this study. On the basis of this data, this study finds that professional conversations and networking that are derived

Figure 3: Desired benefits of attending professional development.

What do you hope to achieve by attending Professional Development?	%
Meet other music teachers	0%
Learn new content and repertoire that can be transferred to the classroom	27%
Create lasting networking relationships with other teachers	2%
Learn new teaching strategies and techniques	20%
All of the above	50%

from professional development sessions are as important as acquiring new teaching strategies and resources and should be further examined as a meaningful mode of professional learning.

Professional dialogue with mentors and colleagues

Resulting data surrounding professional dialogue with colleagues found that 40 percent of teachers currently do not have the opportunity to discuss their teaching and implementation of the curriculum with other music trained teachers. As previously identified in this report, music teachers in particular, are vulnerable to experiencing professional isolation. Krueger (1999) highlights that although all teachers are at risk of potential isolation, music teachers are particularly vulnerable, due to the specialisation of the discipline of music, and the fact that often there may only be one music teacher at each school. The provision of opportunities professional dialogue, with mentors and colleagues, assists in reducing teacher isolation overall (Kelly, 2005). It is alarming that only 40 percent of the teachers in this study indicated that they currently have this option available to them.

Teachers who are able to discuss their teaching with other music-trained teachers presented a clear theme of the benefits of their participation.

Figure 4: Actual benefits of attending professional development.

Benefits of attending Professional Development	%
Creating lasting networking relationships with other teachers	70%
I don't really find any benefits	0%
Learning new content and repertoire that can be transferred to your classroom	91%
Learning new teaching strategies and techniques	93%
Meeting other Music teachers	84%
Other	18%

Participants described these benefits as collegial support, as well as a method of accumulating and building on their music pedagogy, methods and resources.

I always find it interesting to see how other teachers approach certain musical concepts. I also enjoy sharing what works for me and my classes. (Participant 28, Question 24)

It is always good to get new ideas and learn different ways of doing things. (Participant 36, Question 24)

Teachers who do not have the opportunity in professional dialogue with other music-trained teachers gave responses that extended the theme of professional isolation, as explored in the literature review, experienced by music teachers.

Primary music teachers are often quite isolated within their own school in that they are the only practicing primary music teacher. You can share and discuss general teaching practice with other teachers but it is not as beneficial as being able to interact with other music teachers who are in a similar situation. (Participant 12, Question 24)

Isolation for music teacher in primary school is hard; you are usually the only one. Meeting with other music teachers definitely alleviates this and gives you stability. (Participant 16, Question 24)

The literature reviewed highlighted the critical contributing factors to music-teacher isolation as social isolation and lack of pedagogical support (Ballantyne, 2004, 2007). The responses recorded in this study presented a continuation of this theme. While commenting on the opportunity to discuss and share teaching approaches with other music teachers, one participant offered the following comment. In this study, it was revealed that 45 percent of teachers engage in professional dialogue about their teaching with non-music trained colleagues at their school.

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teachers but it is not as beneficial as being able to interact with other music teachers who are in a similar situation. (Participant 12, Question 24)

Isolation for music teacher[s] in primary school is hard; you are usually the only one. Meeting with other music teachers definitely alleviates this and gives you stability. (Participant 16, Question 24)

As previously outlined in the literature review, Kelly (2005) concludes that the provisions of teacher mentoring programs assists in nurturing new teachers while retaining more experienced teachers in the field as mentors. Rothberg (1986) has noted that when professional dialogue does not occur, there are negative flow-on effects, including effects on the achievement of curriculum outcomes, classroom and school music programmes. In this study, only two percent of teachers stated that they did not wish to engage in professional dialogue with other music-trained colleagues. Given the qualitative data in this study, it is anticipated that opportunities for professional dialogue, and collaboration with music trained mentors and colleagues should be provided to all music teachers to prevent professional isolation, and also enhance the professional learning.

Teaching and planning resources

The desire for pedagogical support beyond graduation is emphasised through teachers' responses in this study. For the purpose of this study, 'planning resources' are those which teachers use to assist their planning, and 'teaching resources' are resources such as templates, workbooks and programs that can be utilised during a classroom music lesson.

The request for resource support is recognised by teachers in the study as a means of promoting teacher confidence in the classroom. Whilst commenting on the benefits of mentoring programs participants gave the following responses:

Appropriate advice and ideas for the structure of the planning and developing the music programme

which develop the whole music programme for the college. (Question 14, Participant 34).

Just knowing where to start! There was no plan when I arrived. (Question 14, Participant 35)

To help with repertoire and sequencing of lessons. (Question 14, Participant 23)

Although these responses were given by participants whilst discussing the benefits of having a mentoring program, it is very clear that the provision of curriculum support documents, that provide lesson scaffolding with sample repertoire and professional development surrounding these documents, with opportunities for music teachers to share and discuss repertoire and teaching approaches, would be beneficial to all.

The trending desire for teaching and planning resources to be supplied beyond graduation has a strong precedence within the research of Ballantyne and Packer (2004). Ballantyne and Packer described that music teachers, particularly in their early years of teaching, require more support in their 'development of pedagogical content knowledge and skills' (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004, p. 1) The intention of highlighting this research it is clarify that many early teachers do feel the need for more curriculum and planning support. Participants in this study were asked to rank in order their top three reasons for utilising planning resources. The results of their responses are listed as:

1. For suggested scaffolding of core content progression
2. To learn different or new approaches to teaching core content
3. For planning templates (unit or lesson plan outlines)

The teachers in this study listed the resources that they are currently using to assist their planning. Sixty-eight different resources were identified and listed in the online survey. Most commonly identified resources included music kits, Kodály

method books and notes from summer school or professional development that the participant had attended, followed by past and current curriculum documents. Of particular interest was the large number of teachers that continue to use the Queensland "Outcomes" syllabus materials (QSA, 2002), even though this was officially superseded in 2007. This document provided teachers with a concise level-by-level scaffolding of the core content to be taught from F-9 classroom music. It is also important to highlight that when teachers were asked to select the main reason for utilising planning resources, the main reason was for suggested scaffolding of core content progression. The fact that teachers continue find this document so useful has the potential to inform the development of implementation resources for the Australian Curriculum.

Participants who listed additional resources also included memberships to Australian National Choral Society (ANCA), the Kodály Music Educators' Institute of Australia (KMEIA), Queensland Orff Schulwerk Association (QOSA) and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) website.

Teachers in the study were asked to rank in order their reasons for utilising teaching resources (such as workbooks, templates in classroom lessons). The two main reasons for utilising teaching resources were identified as the following:

1. For ideas of how to change and develop my teaching strategies, and for new teaching approaches.
2. To visually reinforce the aural skills taught.

The teachers in this study listed the resources that they are currently using to assist their teaching. Eight-seven different teaching resources were identified and listed in the online survey. The list of teaching resources given by the participants was diverse; ranging from internet websites that are utilised on interactive white boards and iPads, to templates that students work on in the

classroom to method books that outline how to conduct musical games and activities.

How might these ways of professional learning reduce teachers' feelings of isolation?

It has been identified in this study that teacher confidence and skills, are the key contributing factor to a successful and effective classroom music program (Bainger, 2011). The effectiveness of professional learning, as well as support for curriculum documents and planning, cannot be overlooked as a valuable instrument in providing early teachers planning scaffolding, structure and content progression (Garvis, 2012).

The responses given by participants indicate that teachers are actively seeking to improve their school music programs. Throughout the presentation of the findings of this study a theme of teachers utilising professional development, professional dialogue and professional networking, and teaching and planning resources as a method to continually acquire new repertoire and develop their own pedagogical approaches to teaching classroom music has emerged. It is evident that teachers are happy to share their own teaching methods and resources – the responses and shared lists of resources collated in this study clearly demonstrating that teachers wish to share and acquire new resources from other music teachers.

Alarming, data produced in this study indicates that 74 percent of teachers would like to attend more professional development than they are currently attending with participants on average currently attending professional development once a term. Liebermann and Mace (2010) noted that Little's presented findings indicating that teachers who not only work together sharing resources and teaching strategies, not only prevent the feeling of teacher isolation, but also make a larger commitment to continued learning as within the discipline of teaching and their specific subject, and hence improving

and building on their teaching skills. Forty-five percent of survey participants currently have the opportunity to discuss their pedagogical approaches, resources and repertoire with other music teachers. This study did not record if, how, or where these conversations took place, or if they were with music teachers at the participants' school.

The qualitative data produced in this study supports with the findings of Liebermann and Mace, which emphasises the benefits teachers are experiencing through meeting and sharing resources and pedagogical approaches with other music teachers (Liebermann & Mace, 2010) This data was produced in this study when participants were asked to reflect of their opportunities, or lack of opportunities, that they currently had to share resources with other music teachers on a regular basis. One participant wrote the following comment:

We have network meetings and collaborate, share and help out on the music forum site discussion list with music teachers from all over Queensland. This is very beneficial. (Participant 2, Question 24).

Data in this study also indicated that 40 percent of teachers do not have this option to meet and share resources and pedagogical approaches with other music teachers, even though they have indicated that it would be desirable. The benefits of a 'meet and share' style of resource support has been presented and highlighted through the literature review and in both the qualitative and quantitative data produced in this study. It is the opinion of this study that all classroom music teachers, across state schools and private, should be offered the opportunity to 'meet and share' with other music teachers at the beginning of each school term as a minimum. This would be a valuable resource support for teachers, especially the 40 percent of participants in this study who have indicated in this study that they would like to have this option available to them, but currently do not. Logistically, this would require planning and in a physically large

area such as Queensland, significant travel for teachers involved. However; the literature and the data in this study suggest that this would be beneficial for all. As indicated by Bainger (2011) a critical factor in providing effective music education for students is providing them with a confident and skilled music teacher. Involvement in a 'meet and share' program would assist both specialist and general trained teachers to further develop pedagogical skills, whilst acquiring new repertoire, and resources.

As presented in the literature review, Gruenhagen (2012) noted that the of sharing resources enables teachers to feel more adequately prepared to teach, less isolated, and assist in removing the gaps of equality in Australian middle school music programs. This study suggests that regular opportunities for Foundation – Year 9 classroom music teachers to share teaching approaches and resources should be pursued as a means to reduce feelings of teacher isolation, increase teacher confidence, enable continued professional learning for music teachers and improve the quality classroom music programs.

Potential directions and solutions

In response to the findings of this study, we identify a number of possible directions that music teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, might take as a way of addressing the problem of professional isolation. The establishment of continued teacher education in music pedagogy beyond graduation, the formal establishment of face-to-face and online networks, and the establishment of formal mentoring programs are likely to be effective strategies towards alleviating professional isolation as experienced and described by the participants in this study.

A continuation of teacher education from pre-service education through to the initial years of teaching

Participants in this study identified that they are actively seeking in-service professional development to assist in their planning and teaching. This was particularly evident in teachers who were in their early years of teaching. Responses recorded related to feelings of unpreparedness to teach as a reflection on tertiary training and discipline specific pedagogical knowledge and skills, which led to a sense of professional isolation. A continuation of teacher education that extends through the early years of teaching would provide music teachers in their early years of teaching pedagogical support beyond graduation.

The delivery of this education should be thoughtfully planned and delivered. Music teachers that participated in this study, and also those reflected upon in the literature, reported feeling overwhelmed by the demands of their job in their early years of teaching (Ballantyne, 2007). It would be sensible to structure this education program of music specific pedagogical approaches, knowledge and skills training to take place during school hours, or to provide some time release so that work demands are not further increased.

It is important to note here that some individual schools and school systems offer professional development and induction programs that are specifically tailored for the needs of first year teachers. However, this is not specialised to a discipline area, nor does it involve pedagogical support specific to music teaching, which is precisely what the participants in this study have identified as being needed.

Face to face, and online professional networks

Of the participants in this study, 78 percent outlined an enthusiasm towards attending more professional development. It was highlighted in the findings of this study that the desired outcome of attending professional development was curriculum support and resources, however the flow-on effect was the creation of professional

networks. The provision of local “meet and share” network groups where music teachers would be invited to meet either face-to-face or online to discuss curriculum and pedagogical topics would enable music teachers more opportunities to establish professional connections. It was highlighted previously in the literature review that team teaching and associated professional activities enable music teachers to not only acquire new skills, but can also be utilised as a means to combatting the feelings of teacher isolation (Benson, 2008).

Formal and informal opportunities for mentorship

Although this study has identified that the establishment of professional networks would assist in alleviating isolation and provide a form of mentorship for music teachers, for isolated music teachers, establishing a professional network can be a difficult task. In this study, 40 percent of participants indicated that they currently desired, however did not have access to, mentorship with or a professional network with other music teachers.

Mentorship programs not only assist in alleviating professional isolation in early career teachers, but also professional isolation felt by experienced teachers (Kruger, 1999, Kelly, 2005). The creation of formal mentorship programs through the formal establishment of professional network groups in each geographical area for all music teachers would be timed well with the implementation of the *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to provide an exploration the role of professional learning in reducing isolation experienced by classroom music teachers. This study identifies issues that are critical to ensuring that teachers have the resources, confidence and skills to create effective classroom music programs. In particular, the

findings of this study suggest that music teachers would embrace an opportunity to meet regularly with other music teachers to share ideas and resources, and that this would have a positive effect on both their professional learning and feelings of isolation.

The limitations of this study include a small sample size of fifty-three participants. The sample size was limited as time constraints to complete to the study restricted the ability to involve more participants. As the survey was initially launched online through local professional networks and participants at local professional development sessions, the demanding term-two school calendar meant that participants were also facing their own professional time constraints as they took time out to complete the online survey.

The implementation of the new national curriculum, The Australian Curriculum: The Arts will soon be upon music teachers across Australia. Hartwig and Barton (2004) contend that the success of implementing a new curriculum rests with the curriculum support provided for teachers with the new document. The Music Council of Australia (MCA) outlined that the success of this new national curriculum would be dependent on the support given to teachers through the implementation of resources aligned with the syllabus document (Letts et al., 2012). While this study provided an exploration of teachers' current use of resources, styles and forms of resource support, it also identified potential areas that could be further investigated in order to produce types, styles and forms resources that both adequately support teachers' pedagogical approaches, and also align with the final curriculum document The Australian Curriculum: The Arts.

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