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“I Can’t Sing!” The Concept of Teacher Confidence in Singing and the Use within their Classroom

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Abstract

When teachers become more confident and competent in relation to singing, then they are more likely to use singing and to use it successfully. Teachers are expected to gain such skills in pre-service teacher education, to enhance their capability in teaching music, so that singing can be utilised and supported in schools. Confidence is definitely something that contributes to our performance in all aspects of our life. However, when we are not confident in those skills, we do not perform as well as we should, generally resulting in avoidance of that skill or activity.

When it became apparent, at the end of an Australian University Teacher Education music education elective, that some primary teacher education students could not hold a tune by themselves, or felt confident to sing on their own, a strategy was developed to raise the solo singing standards and perception of confidence level of the next cohort of students. This paper reports on a pilot program aimed at improving the in-tune singing skills and confidence of a class of teacher education students with the aim of increasing the likelihood they will later include singing in their future music programs.

Introduction

Singing is an integral component of teaching music at any Australian or international primary (generalist) school level. Singing is one of the most accessible ways for a teacher to conduct a music program and there are many benefits gained from choosing singing as a music form. Through singing children can learn about the elements of music and develop their musical literacy. However, singing continues to be considered, by most educators, to be a complicated skill that must be learned and one that requires training in breathing, vocal technique and diction together with a basic knowledge of note reading. When the topic of singing is discussed, some involved in the conversation are likely to be quite eager to share stories about their singing ability; expressing opinions about whether or not they qualify as a singer or a non-singer. Sometimes the reactions can be quite extreme. Some shy completely away from singing, to the point of running from the room at the mere suggestion that they might be asked to participate in singing in public while others can have an opposite reaction and experience singing as an enjoyable activity. Many people are happy to sing to the radio or sing without music alone, but in front of others it is often very difficult. Confidence is definitely something that contributes to our performance in all aspects of our life. However, when we are not personally confident in those skills, we do not perform as well as we should, generally resulting in avoidance of that skill or activity.

Singing, generally speaking, is not seen as an attribute or an area in personal development where many pre-service and in-service teachers feel highly confident. Most teachers in both groups, will respond by setting out to convince you that in fact they cannot sing (Crittenden, 2009; Pascale, 2005; JinYoung & Choy, 2009). This perception of personal singing competence and delivery does therefore have an impact on the teachers' instructional decisions to sing or not to sing at all in the classroom.

When it became apparent, at the end of a music education elective in an Australian University teacher education program, that some primary teacher education students could sing musically as a group, but could not hold a tune by themselves or felt confident to sing on their own, a strategy was developed to raise the solo singing standards and in turn, confidence level of the next cohort of students. This paper reports on a pilot program aimed at improving the in-tune singing skills and confidence of a class of teacher education students with the aim of increasing the likelihood they will later include singing in their future music programs.

Related Literature

Music Programs in Australian Schools

In Australian primary schools, the arts are taught by the general classroom teacher and they are required to engage students in the four disciplines that make up the Creative Arts. This then necessitates teachers to attend to different learning strands within syllabus documents and immerse children weekly in all four art forms of Music Dance Visual Arts and Drama. Although some schools do provide opportunities for specialist teachers, in most educational settings in the majority of Australian primary schools, it is the generalist teachers who are responsible for delivering some, if not all of the music education programs. A particular problem as identified by the National Review of Music Education (Department Education Science and Training, 2005, p6) is the unrealistic expectation, particularly of government primary schools, that classroom music will be taught by generalist primary school teachers and there is an ongoing debate about who should be responsible for teaching music education in the primary school (Walker, 2009).

The Australia Council Submission Review (2005) preferred future for school music education is one where music is integral to the core school curriculum and that all students, including those in regional and remote communities, will have access to quality music experiences at school, provided by appropriate qualified teaching staff in appropriate educational outcomes. The National Review of Music paper (2005) considers that the music curriculum is relevant to the needs, concerns and personal experiences of students identifying that the arts form an important part of any healthy and thriving community and participation in musical activity is often equated with a high quality of life (Neumann, 2008). However, Walker (2009) suggests that we live in a world of music but we have drifted towards being consumers rather than creators or participants. This has corresponded in Australian schools with a huge decline seen in music education. The issue has been the subject of reviews and reports such as the 2005 National Review of School Music Education. Based on a NSW survey it is estimated that approximately 35 per cent of primary schools offer no music education at all, with Queensland distinguished by having a specialist music teacher in most primary schools (Crittenden, 2009).

Music education does not just mean children only playing in the traditional 'school band' or 'singing in the choir', but rather, it means having regular opportunities in class time to explore the concepts of music through a program of singing and/or playing instruments, creating music, listening to music and responding. Importantly, at the heart of music education are children's own engagement and the development of their creative and aesthetic sensibilities (Dinham, 2011). Consequently the primary school teacher is in the best position to develop the creative arts program. Concurring with Eisner (2001) that not only should we teach, with

professional expertise, the disciplines of music, dance and drama and the visual arts to our children, but also we should change the ways of teaching and learning math, science, history, and other core subjects to more closely resemble the way teaching and learning take place in the arts. However, a lack of value and support for the creative arts in learning, transfers low levels of importance for the creative arts in the school and therefore, personal implementation in the classroom among teachers. The Australian NSW Syllabus dictates that a total of two hours *per week* is allocated for the creative arts programs (Music, Drama, Dance and Visual Arts) as compared to two hours *per day* for literacy component. Therefore, from the top-down aspect of government policies to teacher level, the value of support for creative arts is clearly indicated in the 'official' allocation of time and comparative value to other learning areas.

Contributing to this, the Stevens report (2003) argued that there is a lack of teacher professional development opportunities, particularly for primary school music teachers, with many states adopting the policy of leaving the provision of in-service education to teacher professional associations. In a 2009 survey of 28 universities teacher education programs, on average, 41.75 hours of preservice teacher education are devoted to creative arts subjects, with only 16.99 hours given to the study of music itself in the surveyed teacher training programs (Hocking, 2009, p.5). Hocking's report (2009, p.4) also found that there is no musical competency specified by teacher accreditation authorities for generalist primary teachers, but rather, there is a general expectation that 'teachers need to know their content'. Interestingly, in past decades it was a requirement that all preservice teachers had to be able to sing and play an instrument before being allowed to graduate (Dinham, 2011). The findings from Hocking (2009) survey and report emphasises this is no longer the case, with most programs in teacher training offering very few hours of music instruction and little opportunity for learning musical content, knowledge and skills. Today, most only get a cursory introduction to music (Dinham, 2011). These are major concerns in relation to the decline in the amount of musical curriculum studies in the course of generalist primary school education, resulting from an increasingly crowded primary school curriculum and a consequent decrease in the time allocation for musical curriculum studies. With the result that:

Australian generalist primary teaching graduates, unless they have undertaken elective music and/or music education units within their courses are unlikely to be sufficiently competent or confident to teach music effectively in their classes (National Review 2005 p 6).

Non-confidence

The issue of generalist teachers' confidence in teaching music in the primary school classroom has been the focus of various researches over a number of years. Reviewing the last twenty years of research in music education both in Australia and internationally reveals that

most studies of primary music education have been conducted on the confidence in teaching music and self-efficacy of primary student teachers (Auh, 2004, 2006; Bresler, 1993; Bandura 1997, Barnes, 2000, Brown, 1993; Gifford, 1991; Holden and Button 2006; Hennessy, 2000; Jeanneret, 1997; Mills, 1996, 1989; Gifford, 1993; Russell-Bowie, 2000; Russell-Bowie, 1993). This research has found a connection between a teacher's confidence level and the incorporation of musical activities in the classroom. Researchers have argued that it is not the level of musical skill itself such as singing, but more importantly it is the relationship between that specific skill and the confidence of the teacher to perform and teach the musical skill that is the determining factor. Primary generalist school teachers lack confidence in teaching music, and that more specifically, have been found to be more apprehensive about teaching music than most other school subjects (Auh 2006 & 2004; Hargreaves, Lamont, Marshall & Tarrant, 2003; Bresler 1993; Brown, 1993; Gifford, 1991, Gifford 1993; Russell-Bowie, 2009, Russell-Bowie 1993; Ballantyne & Packer 2004; Kim & Choy, 2008; Welch, 1995; Housego, 1990). It was recognized that two significant factors contributed to a teacher's self-perception in teaching music. These are the individual's personal beliefs in their skills and abilities to assist student learning, and their own beliefs about their self-preparedness to teach, or to even use music, in the classroom (Bandura, 1997; Barnes, 2000). Both quantitative and qualitative results in studies reported low confidence in generalist preservice and inservice teachers' ability to teach music and use skills such as singing in the primary classroom (Auh, 2006 & 2004; Kim & Choy, 2008; Holden and Button, 2006; Jeanneret, 1997; Housego, 1990; Mills, 1989).

At ground level, teachers do question, their ability to recognise a child's potential in music if their own understanding and personal confidence levels of music is limited. With reference to student teachers, it has been argued that efficacy beliefs play a definite role in obtaining and interpreting the knowledge offered in teacher training programmes (Poulou, 2007). These beliefs then in turn have a greater effect on the way prospective teachers organize their teaching acts and what they do and how they deliver rather than knowledge obtained.

Use of Singing by the Teacher in the Classroom

Within the scope of the performing arts, singing is a fundamental and integral part of human nature (Neumann, 2008). In order to maximise the benefits of music participation for individual development, good quality musical experiences, particularly vocal experiences, must begin early in life. From singing comes musical literacy as well as the broader benefits across other areas of learning. From vocally-based learning, students can then choose to learn an instrument if desired, and educators are in a position to move forward, confidently assuming children's rudimentary musical knowledge (National Review submission 2005). Research demonstrates how valuable singing is physically, mentally, psychologically and emotionally to the developing child (Pascale, 2005). Many of us as teachers, have watched the

joy on children's faces, the eagerness and excitement, the interest and focus of the group as children participate in singing as part of a normal school day. In early childhood settings, singing plays a vital role, not only in the development of music skills but also in the development of physical, social, and language skills (Bintz, 2010; Richards, 1999). This particular research indicates that music charges the brain and the more we sing, the more we strengthen the communication between the two sides of the brain. Too often this connection has atrophied and learning has become one-sided (Pascale, 2005). For many such reasons students need to experience the life-long benefits of singing and it is important that young children have many opportunities to engage in singing as an integral part of the classroom.

From the Australian National Arts Draft Curriculum (ACARA) 2010, the music objectives state that:

- students learn through frequent and accumulative engagement with music in individual and shared experiences;
- develop a repertoire of known musical works (chants, songs, rhythms, rhymes, melodies)
- can engage confidently in singing and playing, individually, and in groups, and to a range of audiences.
- imagine and realize others' musical works by singing, moving, and playing instruments.
- music learning is continuous as students re-visit skills, knowledge and understanding at levels of increasing depth and complexity throughout their education (Oct 2010, p. 17).

Arguments pertaining as to Music being regarded as a core curriculum subject to be included in the Australian National Curriculum have resulted in much heated discussion. Discussing these objectives, in his Music Council of Australia annual report (2010), Professor Robin Stevens identified there is a threat to music being regarded as a core curriculum subject and that most Australian states have moved away from school-based curriculum development and have embraced the National Curriculum Draft Framework with adaptations to suit their own needs. Therefore, in line with the outcomes and perspectives of this draft curriculum, and the existing individual Australian states current curriculums, and to be seen as meeting the above draft objectives, the general consensus appears to be that singing within schools is an important part of teaching music and the use of songs in primary schools is expected to be a substantial part of the school environment. Teacher education courses also do have objectives which focus on vocal teaching skills with the hope and expectation that singing will be integrated in the classroom (Lewis, 2001; Anderson & Lawrence, 2004). However, the current

quality of music education in Australian schools is variable, and this is associated to the quality of teacher training as well as the status of music education in Australian schools.

Perceptions, Anxieties and Implications

Unfortunately, singing has become separated from the daily lives of people who are now largely consumers, and as our society becomes more technologically oriented, singing does not find as prominent a place as it did in the past (Phillips, 2003, p 5). Acknowledging that singing is essential in students' education, there is currently an absence of the inclusion of singing in the classroom. Anxieties towards singing can prevent these 'expected' objectives from being achieved. There are many anecdotal observations made regarding people commenting that they believe they cannot sing, or that they are simply tone deaf. Regrettably, singing still continues to be thought of as some type of gift for the "gifted" and can be considered embarrassing and intimidating when a person sings poorly.

The quality and frequency of singing and other music activities offered to children depends on many factors. It is a common misperception by teachers, both in-service and pre-service, that musical talent is a pre-requisite for singing (Smith 2006; Phillips 2003; Bresler 1995). Many preservice teachers also begin their training with a deeply rooted view that teaching music requires 'gifts' grounded in instrumental, vocal performance skills and the reading of musical notation and once those beliefs are solidified, they become difficult to change (Dinham, 2011; Abril, 2007; Poule, 2007; Russell Bowie, 2009; Russell Bowie, 2003; Welch, 1995; Richards, 1999). Some of this deficiency of the teacher's confidence in being able to use singing in the classroom can be traced to the influence of their own personal singing experiences as a child or a student. Anecdotal comments throughout this pilot study included such as "If you are told you cannot sing or you are rejected for the choir, it can create an inbuilt belief in yourself that you cannot hold a tune and hence you should not 'open your mouth'." Negative experiences of singing in preservice teachers' background also contribute to their fear of failure in their music education courses (Russell-Bowie, 2009). Within early childhood education, researchers also consistently raise their concerns of teacher insufficient confidence in conducting singing activities for young children. Their self-confidence in their own musical ability is questioned (Gifford, 1993; Kim & Choy, 2008; Holden and Button, 2006; Dees, 2004; Richards, 1999).

Consequently these personal negative experiences and misconceptions held by some educators because of the past experiences with singing, may then hamper in turn their ability to create a classroom environment, encouraging children to sing and instilling a positive attitude towards singing (Richards, 1999). Teachers who support this notion that singing ability is an inborn trait which should be reserved for the 'talented few', may end up contributing to a school society in which their own students will experience singing anxiety

and choose not to participate in music. Furthermore, consequences of these beliefs and self-restrictions are that we now have classroom teachers who rarely, if ever, sing with their students (Pascale, 2005).

The Development of the Research

Singing with children, teaching children to sing and helping to develop a desire to sing are three of the most important things the early childhood and primary teacher can do (Dinham 2011; Button & Holden, 2006; Mizener, 2004). Regardless of false assumptions, misconceptions and negative past experiences, it is important that as educators and teachers, we try to demonstrate and encourage the importance of singing to students, both child and adult. A talent for spelling makes it easier to learn to spell, and a talent for working mathematically makes the solving of problems easier, but we do not excuse children from spelling or mathematics simply due to lack of talent. Instead, we teach skills to learn how to achieve those competencies, to be confident in what they are doing (Smith, 2006). Subsequently through the use of singing, through the knowledge and practising of those learnt skills, musical competencies can be achieved. What is required therefore is to encourage skill building to develop confidence levels, in order to learn how to achieve those competencies which will then assist in both teachers and children engaging with music. When teachers become more confident and competent with learning and making music themselves, they are more likely to teach music and to teach it successfully (Dinham, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Kassner & Campbell, 2006). Against this background, a frame of reference for this research project was established; recognizing it is imperative to think about shifting the way singing is perceived and implemented in teaching, particularly for those who believe they cannot sing or that others sing better than they do.

Context for the Research

This pilot study was undertaken in a School of Education faculty at a regional university in NSW. In the four year Teacher Education Program, the compulsory requirements of the course include two units studied on the Creative arts. This involves two by ten weeks of content devoted to the four art forms of Music, Dance, Drama and Visual Arts. In the normal program of study, the students complete their first unit in their first semester of the first year and the second unit in the second semester of their second year. The two units give a basic foundation of pedagogy and resources of the creative arts from Early Childhood through to Stage Three (years five and six) in the Primary Sector. In their third and fourth year, as part of requirements for completion of their degree, undergraduate students are given the opportunity to participate in a total of three electives. The elective being discussed in this research is the only arts elective offered at the university in this teacher education program. The elective is offered to other faculties as well.

A total of twenty two participants were involved in the study; nineteen students from the Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree; with these participants being generalist trained; two students from the Bachelor of Arts, and one student from the combined degree Bachelor of Education/Bachelor of Music. Students participated in a weekly workshop session of four hours duration for eleven weeks. In this pedagogy course students sang, played instruments, engaged in pedagogical activities and theoretical background related to children' learning and music .The overview of the unit involved discussion and practical experiences of theoretical and practical concepts. These included theorists of music; concepts of teaching music through listening, through singing, through playing, through movement, and included an overview of the use of music as therapy and special needs children The students in the allocated time learned the guitar, created spontaneous and planned group presentations, listened to music and participated in practical activities using vocal and body percussion, tuned and un-tuned instruments, DVD's, CD's and piano accompaniment. The nature of the unit involved scheduled class time with an expectation of hours outside class time to be undertaken by students for private study and assessment purposes. The student teachers were assessed in front of their peers (40%) for individual and paired peer teaching presentations involving writing discussing and presenting activities from units of work related to musical concepts for the primary child, and for their individual development in singing and guitar (60%). This paper focuses on Assessment one- the individual singing assessment task.

The Problem, Task and Process

Improving teachers' skills and knowledge is one of the most important investments of time and money that local, state, and national leaders make in education. Therefore teaching practices to specifically influence the preservice teachers' relationships between learning in, through and about music, and in particular their own singing skills and confidence understanding were established. The nature of the elective unit was both pedagogical and skilled based. From previous years student cohorts and review of assessment tasks, it was recognized that though the participants established and extended their guitar skills and some primary teacher education students could sing musically as a group, when it came to solo singing, they could not hold a tune by themselves or felt confident to sing on their own. A strategy was then put into place to improve self-efficacy in their perceptions of singing, singing anxiety and their singing skill. The study was undertaken to determine whether participants' levels of confidence to sing improved, after engaging in activities designed to influence their perception of singing as an effective tool and instrument for themselves and for implementation in the classroom.

In the 1990s, a wave of research delved deeper into student learning, focusing on students' reasoning and problem solving potentials rather than only on basic skills of "generic" teaching skills (Hill and Cohen, 2005). This research suggested that professional development can

influence teachers' classroom practices significantly and lead to improved student achievement when it focused on how students learn particular subject matter and instructional practices that are specifically related to the subject matter and how students understand it. Close alignment of professional development with actual classroom conditions also was considered a key factor (Hill and Cohen, 2005). Aligning substantive training within the curriculum and teachers' actual work experiences also is seen as vital. Research shows that professional development and hence confidence, leads to better instruction and improved student learning when it connects to the curriculum materials that teachers use, and ultimately connect to state academic standards that guide their work, their understanding and their ability and confidence to use those materials, and then measure through assessment and accountability the processes that evaluate their success (Hill and Cohen, 2005).

Professional development should improve teachers' knowledge of the subject matter that they are teaching, and it should enhance their understanding of student thinking in that subject matter and to be effective, professional development must provide teachers with a way to directly apply what they learn to their teaching. While adequate time for professional development is essential, studies also show that by itself, more time does not guarantee success. If the sessions do not focus on the subject-matter content, then the duration will do little to change teachers' practices and improve student learning.

With this belief structure in mind, the music elective units teaching practice concentrated on making sure that the professional development was focused on the subject matter the student teachers will be teaching; the alignment of the students teachers' learning opportunities with their real work and practicum experiences using actual curriculum materials and assessments; providing adequate time and materials and individual practice (within the constraints of the unit) for both personal and professional development and ensured that the extended opportunities to learn emphasise observing and analysing the preservice teachers own understanding and confidence levels of the subject matter.

As part of Assessment one, students were asked to demonstrate their performance level in singing to their lecturer by the end of week one, and then practice throughout the semester to develop their skills. As well, they were required to keep a weekly journal where they reflected on their development. Through the workshops, singing groups were established both as a large cohort and then through utilisation of small groups of three or four students, with weekly singing sessions undertaken on a regular basis. These smaller groups then combined to a group of six to eight students and aimed to present to their peers a rendition of songs meeting specific criteria regarding musical elements, practicalities and understandings which were elaborated upon in their small group singing performance.

Students who felt more confident in their own personal skills were placed with those who felt less confident and small tasks were given each week to assist their understanding of singing skills and personal development of confidence. The piano was utilised as an accompaniment for the large cohort, CD accompaniment used for the smaller groups and 'acapella' singing was utilised by small and individual group by their own group choice. A Compact Disc was also made for the students which contained vocal exercises, songs for both male and female voices of degree in difficulty and songs they could choose for their final assessment tasks. Songs in class and on the CD were chosen from the Australian Broadcast Commission (ABC) Sing books which relate specifically to the Australian Music Curriculum. These songs were used and added to within the singing time held each weekly workshop with the understanding they should be utilised extensively at home. At the end of semester, students demonstrated their development by first of all singing in their small allocated groups, and then individually singing two pieces of their own choice to the lecturer. Verbal discussion was also conversed with the lecturer and then final summation was written of their thoughts to the singing assignment.

The nature of this specific Assessment One involved the students in enhancing and hopefully developing their personal singing skills and to ultimately sing confidently on their own. It was stressed that the students were 'assessed' for quality of self-improvement. The term 'confidence' in this current study is based on the concept proposed by Holroyd and Harlen (1996) and later applied in research investigating trainee primary school teachers' confidence to teach music (Hennessy, 2000), considered as being a feeling of self-assurance, a feeling that the task can probably be completed well with the knowledge and skills one possesses and without having to call on others for rescue (Holroyd and Harlen, 1996, p 326). Data was collected through structured one to one interviews at both the beginning and end of the project, their weekly reflective journals, and details of informal conversations and interpretations of events which also included observations in the classroom setting as they participated in weekly singing activities and in their final assessment task. Students were interviewed in the first week of semester in respect to perception of their own confidence, personal standards and musicality in singing, and what they hoped to achieve from the completion of the task in the unit. These questions were asked again in the final week of semester with comments both in an informal spoken and written format.

Practical benchmark tasks involved students on a one to one basis in: singing scales with and without assistance ranging in various tone and degree; echo singing *soh me* patterns ranging in varying tones and degree; arpeggios ascending and descending; individual notes pitched on the piano and pitched to voice only; singing phrases with and without accompaniment and singing two songs of their own choice and choice of accompaniment. The questions served to guide each interview, journal and singing benchmark 'tests' were presented in the same order

and manner for each participant. The initial interview questions and benchmark tasks in singing were developed as informed by the investigators knowledge of research literature and personal experiences in working with students who reported singing apprehension and poor self efficacy. These tasks were undertaken again at the end of the semester.

Discussion of the Investigation

Throughout the semester, various themes emerged as all twenty two respondents reported on their perceptions of own confidence and personal growth in skills, as a result of their involvement in the weekly singing activities. They shared both at the beginning and the end of semester, aspects of both personal and professional outlook towards their perceived ability, opinions, concerns, standards and musicality in singing, and singing in front of their peers and with children. All twenty two respondents shared aspects about their empowerment to use singing in the classroom, as in their ability in teaching a song to others, singing with a class using CD; iTunes, tapes etc., singing and teaching a song on their own and all respondents shared aspects of other learning and realisations they had achieved through the completion of this assessment task in the unit.

Initial Findings

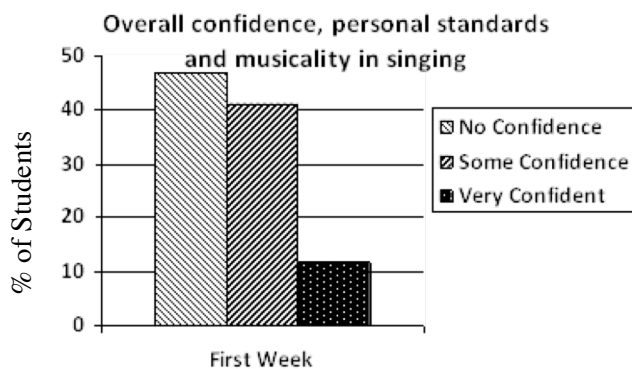


Figure 1. Students initial perceptions.

Students were interviewed on a one to one basis in the first week of semester in respect to perception of their own confidence levels, personal standards and musicality in singing, teaching a song and what they hoped to achieve from the completion of the task in the unit. These questions were asked again in the final week of semester with comments both in an informal spoken and written format. Initial findings shown below display their answers from

‘no confidence’ to ‘very confident’ on their personal perspective on singing and their own musicality. This confirms an overall low confidence in these parameters.

However, these initial results only provided a benchmark for the project. Further analysis of the qualitative comments by the students allowed the cohort to be divided into four main levels of singing confidence and perception:

(a) I just can't sing:

Three participants initially commented that "I cannot sing". Preliminary findings from these benchmark tasks and personal journal data revelations were supported in their initial practical session, indicating that they could not pitch accurately at all in these preliminary tasks.

Representative comments include:

Unfortunately I cannot sing and was not blessed with this gift to put it nicely. I understand that all people can sing, just some can't sing well and this is me. All though I love singing along to a song as I drive alone I am well aware than I have no concept of tone, pitch or key. I would love to improve and become more confident as I appreciate music so very much and would love to incorporate it into the classroom as much as possible. (Student 9)

I know I lose a tune sometimes and sometimes completely lose the pitch. I do try hard and would love to feel confident to sing; I really cannot sing however, it would be even better to have my confidence level match my ability level. If I did sing, I would hate to confidently sing like crap! (Student 12)

We have to sing??? Oh no, here we go again, I thought CAPA 2 was my last experience with singing! I just can't sing! (Student 2)

(b) I can sing but ...

Nine respondents felt that they could hold a tune and enjoyed singing when alone but aspects such as their ability and perception in their voice, and apprehension of singing alone affected them. Representative comments included:

I don't feel confident singing around people and in fact it is something that I'd never do. I do not consider myself to have a good voice, not that I have been told so- I am just not confident. (Student 3)

I really struggle to sing above 'so' (do-rae-me), I haven't realised that before now really as I have sung in my comfort zone all my life I guess, and I prefer to stay there, but I am going to try and sing I just need to gain some confidence and competence over the next few weeks and hopefully I will see some improvement. (Student 7)

Singing in front of family is fine, they do not care, but singing in front of others is embarrassing to me. (Student 6)

I do not have a great voice but I do enjoy singing, but not in front of others, especially if I am the only one, not a part of a group. I know that I lack confidence in this area, I can public speak, act, debate but when it comes to singing, i have no control over what comes out and the previous knowledge that it's going to be an ordinary noise only makes me feel less confident. (Student 11)

My husband told me he doesn't like to hear me sing, he says I drone, so I don't. (Student 18)

I am a bit worried about singing alone, as I believe I don't have a very in tuned voice, well at least that's what I have been told. (Student 21)

Oh boy, I have a big job ahead of me because when it comes to singing in front of people; I usually get nervous and cannot bring myself to sing. I guess that is why this unit really appealed to me. (Student 8)

(c) I can sing but I do not have confidence...:

Seven respondents felt that they could sing satisfactorily but lacked confidence and needed to improve more in themselves. Representative comments included:

Though I love to sing, I'm definitely not a confident singer. I am very happy to sing in groups or by myself when no one or just my family are around but I have never (properly) sung by myself in front of my peers. I really hope that by the end of this unit I am a lot more confident at singing by myself or in small groups, because at the moment the idea terrifies me!! (Student 22)

I never really have any desire to sing by myself (as in performance) but I am more than happy to sing with my peers. I know I won't be the best singer in the world but gaining the confidence that I feel I am in this unit - I want to be able to do it out in school. (Student 1)

I can sing ... sort of ... and from this unit the main thing I want to gain is confidence, it is the backbone I believe to anything. If you do not have the confidence behind you everything you try to achieve will never be met to the best of your abilities and I would like to be confident when I sing!! (Student 4)

On pracs I have found it a bit scary when I have tried teaching children to sing a new song. I want to sing it perfect so that the children have a good model to copy from but my voice sometimes tightens up and I get so embarrassed and I stop singing. (Student 5)

(d) Yes I can sing but I want to ...

Three respondents felt that they had good singing voices but wished to do more.

Representative comments included:

I am a passionate singer, I love to make up my own music and really enjoy singing in groups- some people say I have a nice voice, and I am not sure. Other people's opinions mean more to me than I care to admit, and I think that with regard to singing that is really evident, so in this Unit and class environment of complete support and trust I feel really open to trying my best and growing more! (Student 10)

After I got my tonsils out I had scar tissue which has given me a pleasant continuous croaky throat! I was going to consider speech therapy which I was told could help. This is one reason why I am excited about this component of the course because it could help my throat with some training. I have always enjoyed singing however now can't stand the fact that I can't sing the songs I used to be able to sing. I hope during this semester I will slowly be able to improve myself so that I can sing all the songs I want to sing and learn a higher range for primary school songs. (Student 19)

Sometimes I may think I am a good singer and this is when I may be listening to music and will sing along to it, either in the car or while just relaxing at home. So knowing that I can hold a tune, I am looking forward to improving on and be more confident in singing especially when it comes to teaching students of my own class to sing. (Student 14)

Throughout the Semester

In week three of semester the students were placed into small groups of no more than four members. They were given weekly tasks in workshop time and then asked to sing as a small group in class to their peers. This was quite separate from singing as one large group. Students reported on aspects of these activities.

Representative comments included:

This week we were placed into small singing groups according to our pitch and singing range. The group sang well together and it feels comfortable singing in a small group. I don't like doing anything I can't do well and singing is no exception. (Student 22)

I am starting to really enjoy singing in our little group of four, and getting to know them is good too ... - it is actually much nicer to sing with only a few other people, and listen to the differences in our voices. (Student 11)

I feel as though singing in the little groups is really beneficial for me as I could hear myself sing and partner with Sarah who has similar range as me. I guess you can get away with not singing in tune in the big groups however when the little groups practice it's really 'crunch' time. This 'crunch' time makes me perform better as a) You have to sing, and b) I know that practice makes perfect. (Student 5)

I feel really comfortable within this group, when we go inside the music closet to practise we get straight into the singing and make the most of our time. I feel as though I am improving within the group, I can hear when I am off key or my timing is out. I think we are all honing in on each other's singing to tighten our group performance. (Student 3)

The singing groups are working well, I enjoy singing with Anita she I feel has the same tone and although a better range than myself has a very similar one. Although I wish I was developing faster in music I am seeing a smidge of improvement (Student 9)

I didn't feel as nervous singing in our mini groups in front of everybody else as I thought I would!!!! (Student 7)

While practicing in our small group today, Nathan and I have been practicing singing numerous songs that are just out of our pitch range to try and slowly increase our range! This is still embarrassing and difficult I find! Lucky we are gradually getting more confident to sing in front of each other and make mistakes (Student 14)

Students Final Perceptions

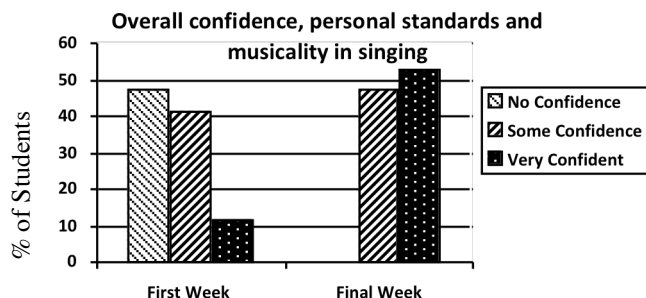


Figure 2. Students' final perceptions.

The twenty two participant's responses to the final interview questions and practical tasks revealed clear indications of growth and underlying areas which had developed within the short time frame. These included: personal skill growth in singing skills itself; self-confidence in singing; confidence in implementation of singing in the classroom and other areas of learning they had gained

from being part of the singing workshops in the unit. The comparative graph confirmed an overall dramatic increase in their overall confidence in singing and musicality.

The three students who perceived initially that they could not sing at all commented strongly on the learning and skills they had developed through the task and this was demonstrated in their final practical assessment, as they matched correct pitch throughout their 'performances'. A representative comment from one of these three students when asked about improvement in their perception of singing skills and musicality was:

It certainly did. It was easy to think back to where I started and where I am now. Eleven weeks doesn't seem like enough time to improve one's standards but I can honestly and safely say that my singing standards have improved so much more than I could honestly ever imagine. Do you know I now think I can actually sing and can even stay in tune! I think that is amazing for me! (Student 9)

All twenty-two students responded to their personal growth in respect to perceived ability, opinions, standards and musicality in singing. The participants noted improvement in one or more of these areas.

Representative comments include:

I believe that my singing standard has improved as I am much more aware of my pitch when singing, I actually ask myself (in my head, while singing) 'how would this melody look on sheet music?' and I visualise the sheet music to the song which guides me in my singing of the song.

I didn't even really sing before undertaking this unit. To now understand small concepts like pitching, breathing and just the joining in and singing along, I know I must have improved my singing standard...even just in myself! (Student 11)

Yes, I feel I can now sing with the correct pitch and tone or a song. Now I actually feel quite confident to sing in front of friends and most importantly a class. (Student 14)

I know that I still have a long way to go, but I feel that I know so much more about singing and reading music than when I first began. My musicality has improved greatly. I knew very little about music other than previous units undertaken in CAPA I & II. Practicing every week and enjoying it as well, how could my singing not have improved? My only wish is that I could have spent more time enjoying this unit. (Student 19)

When I first began classes, and someone would reach the highest of notes in some songs- I would think- my gosh, I will never be able to do that... though after participating in each tutorial, and practice at home, I am now able to do things that I never thought possible ... and it feels so great to think I can do that! (Student 7)

In terms of development and perception of confidence all participants responded positively. All twenty students reported that the experience had empowered them in varying degrees of skill and self-development; all students reported development of self-confidence and all respondents discussed the ability to implement singing more confidently in the classroom. Representative comments include:

(a) Confidence and self- development:

Though, I have learnt so much more, on top of confidence- I have definitely developed further in terms of my overall singing standard, I can hear when I go wrong and try to listen to fix it up and I believe that confidence is a huge aspect of this. (Student 3)

Before I started this unit I was not confident at singing in front of others, especially singing solo, but now I feel I have become a more confident and stronger singer. I am able to reach higher notes and sustain them for longer than before. (Student 12)

I do believe my confidence improved greatly from the first week with the big lump in my throat and the racing heart. I was very anxious about the thought of even singing. That stand offish approach has over, the weeks disappeared within me. I no longer worry about where I'm standing and I look forward to singing with the group. I find it very relaxing as well. When we've finished singing I feel I've accomplished and can achieve great things. (Student 2)

Yes, I feel as though I have learnt a lot from the classes. The confidence aspect was something I wanted to grow, and the main reason in choosing this elective unit. Though, I have learnt so much more, on top of confidence- I have definitely developed further in terms of my overall singing standard, and believe that confidence is a huge aspect of this. (Student 13)

(b) Implementation in the classroom:

I am so glad that I now have the confidence to go out into a classroom and sing in front of students with little or no shame- it teaches students such an important thing- confidence, and that singing should be for enjoyment, not to grade somebody on the talent they do/don't have. I intend on doing that! (Student 1)

Undertaking the singing component in Music and Children has given me the confidence to believe I can now go into a classroom and encourage children to want to sing. It has also shown me how engaging and exciting singing can be. It has taught me that everyone is capable of singing. (Student 22)

I loved all of the activities we got to participate in, and I am sure that I will do the same with my students when teaching. I was amazed at how much music, and singing is seen as not important in most schools, yet how easy and fun it is to include it as part of everyday classroom activities. (Student 11)

In terms of other areas of learning students had gained from being part of the singing workshops in the unit, these were varied in comments in relation to benefits gained from participation. Representative comments include:

Throughout this unit we have been encouraged that you do not have to be a great singer to sing and given the knowledge that all children can sing. Professionally to have been given the opportunity to experience this first hand has been the most wonderful experience. It has made me realise how much some students are missing out in their learning experiences. I have now a greater understanding of

how to successfully integrate music into the curriculum and I plan to do this. Although I may not be the greatest singer or guitar player to just bring that enjoyment into the classroom will be so rewarding for both me and my students. Thank you for the experience. (Student 8)

This unit has opened my eyes to another world of teaching. Singing is such a universal aspect of life and has the ability to create so many different feelings. I almost feel now after completing this unit that you are depriving your students of a whole learning style if you don't appreciate and see the quality of the teaching and learning that comes from incorporating singing into student's lives. Music and Children has given me the confidence to successfully implement music into my classroom and enrich the lives of some many students through song and dance. It has provided me with a range of resources ready to take straight into your classroom and teach and also the skills and strategies to support the teaching and using of singing. (Student 9)

As I said in my journal, I have come to many realisations during this eleven week period. Firstly, I used to think I sang out loud – I didn't. Secondly, that people with real talent should be the only ones to sing – now even I can feel ok about singing. And thirdly, that no matter how old you are or how badly you start off there is always the ability to improve – even if those improvements may be small. You just got to do it and get in and sing! (Student 20).

Professionally, my pedagogy has been reshaped and formed to incorporate not only a theory of the value of singing in education, but now it includes an image of how I can make valuable musical education unfold in the classroom- and that is something I am so grateful for! (Student 5)

I have learnt so much that I didn't expect to about myself as a person, and a professional within teaching. Beginning this unit my goal was to build up more confidence with students within the area of music. I did not expect my learning to go far beyond that. I have enjoyed every class- and taken so much from each one- the different theorists, fun activities, great music...and the skills of singing ... the list goes on! (Student 15)

Discussion of the Outcomes

This paper has considered aspects that have emerged from reflections of the students after they had been part of the implementation of this improvement with in-tune singing skills and

confidence project. Although varied in their initial perceptions and expectations, what emerged in the group responses were overwhelming positive reactions from all recipients.

The main areas that emerged through this study were:

1. Students' personal skills in singing were enhanced when they participated in the workshops.
2. Students felt more empowered generally in singing and realised that to be able to sing is not just for the talented few, but for all.
3. Students felt more empowered to sing with their peers, to sing with children and to confidently implement singing activities in the classroom.
4. Through the use of interactive group setting and individual activities, students were more confident in their own ability and importantly, their own perception to sing. It was felt that small group utilisation assisted their empowerment.
5. Students acknowledged they still had further learning and development to implement but that the students valued the aspect of peer teaching where encouragement with and towards each other was maintained throughout.

Although the sample was small, being only twenty two students from an elective group and cannot be indicated universally, the study was useful in that it was distinctive in providing feedback of a successful approach to encourage the changing of self-perception of singing in preservice teachers. This in turn should affect these participants' own use of singing in their future classrooms. The study adds to the literature on successful educational musical experiences and may serve as a reference point for future discussion.

Implications for Practice

There is generally not enough academic, political and philosophical support of arts education, music and general musical experiences and in particular the use of singing. A combination of a critical lack of qualified, experienced and/or confident 'generalist music teachers', the general lack of cross cultural links in music and musical experiences in schools, combined with the lack of pre-service training in the facilitation of music and musical experience, and the pressure on teachers and learners to meet literacy and numeracy benchmark, results in music engagement and self-efficacy not being implemented or encouraged as it should be in Australian primary schools and perhaps internationally.

This research pilot project has indicated that within the context of Australian education, the issues of significance of singing within teacher preparedness are essentially relevant issues. Teacher education programs should address the fact that specialised pre-service training should be included which promotes confidence and competencies in effective arts pedagogy

with an arts wide vision, and in particular, for singing specifically itself and the use of singing in their own classrooms. Not all teachers have the talent or expertise to be specialists in music as part of their classroom teaching. However, if the governments and educational institutions and the preservice teachers themselves personally value what music can offer their students, and if they are valued for this knowledge and interest, then partnerships with other experts, such as professional music organisations, musicians and community groups, can offer the answer to the provision of quality musical and in particular, singing experiences within the school curriculum. Eisner (2001) pushed the discussion of arts and education to a new level, raising the bar on future expectations for the role of the arts in educating the whole child. He established that the arts have far greater utility to learning than simply being a tool to teach other subjects. In respect to singing, it is significant in encouraging both the preservice teacher and the children how to learn how to say what cannot be said and to give and gain experiences that can be had from no other source.

We should embrace the fact that there are differences in people — in aptitude, interest, and proclivity. Teacher training does not end with the receipt of a diploma. It must be completed in the schools. A good school is one that has an environment and an ecology that supports the growth of all the participants not just the kids (Eisner, 2001).

Children learn best about the world by listening, thinking, acting and integrating new experiences - experiential learning is the format in which we own our own learning whether we are a child or an adult. Music education and singing experiences assist in young children's early language development, kinaesthetic intelligence, mathematical intelligence (experiencing patterning, measuring, rhythm, repetition etc. through another medium), and development of individual and group dynamics in creating and participating in performance, (social development). Singing supports literacy instruction and promotes content area learning and it is therefore important to promote singing as a tool to learn in and through, across the curriculum (Kassell, 1997; Smith, 2000). Singing encourages the value of listening; supporting the intricacies of learning to hear the different tones and pitch of keys, thereby allowing children to hear the small complexities of speech. This then can also assist in enablement of fluency in other languages. Singing should be supported in schools where everyone sings, where it is possible to build educational communities that encourage finding, recognizing, listening to, and celebrating every voice. Singing is also a form of expression and when we sing, we are developing timing, pitch and tone of music. Each note of the song is a procession to the next and together, they develop a confidence and skill based story.

Through this small scale study, conclusions were formed that we should inspire and cultivate in our preservice teachers the concept that singing should definitely be seen as the opportunity and ability to be musically expressive. We should prepare our teachers to encourage singing in

schools which will assist in giving our future children, more confidence to undertake or overcome other obstacles in their lives. We see many articles in music education journals and in music texts that make a perfunctory attempt to address the issue of those who do not sing by making definite statements about 'how everyone is a singer and everyone can sing.' However, it is not always a successful and effective strategy to just inform and attempt to convince classroom teachers that they are singers merely by telling them they can sing. What is definitely needed is to identify why they class themselves as non-singers and then to encourage the changing of that perception by professional development and understanding through and in physical and emotional involvement with singing. It is essential to assist teachers to shift the way singing is personally perceived and implemented, particularly for those who believe they cannot sing. From comments made from the preservice teachers involved in the study reflected that as teachers we don't have to try to be musical, to be musical. Encouragement should be employed to simply sing and to use singing with our students.

Concluding Comments

Even though this study is small and in particular to one Australian education context, the findings from this project are appropriate to the field as a whole. The information should assist individuals who are interested in promoting singing -in-learning and as a tool for learning. Teachers are expected to gain such skills in pre-service teacher education, to enhance their confidence and capability in teaching music, therefore all teachers must understand the instructional rationale, feel confident in their skills and recognize the benefits to effectively teach these skills in their classrooms (Garvis & Prendergast, 2010). Music education for pre-service primary teachers still consists of curriculum-based arts education, incorporating other arts areas such as visual arts, dance, media, and drama. Competing amongst these subject areas reduces the time spent specifically on music, and considering that music carries its own language, notation, communication methods, and practices, this is a worrying trend. Pre-service students are themselves the product of a system where music skills are inadequately provided, compounding the problem. No wonder teachers lack the confidence to pass on a love and knowledge of music.

Self-efficacy in any subject matter is not unique and classroom teachers who have low efficacy with maths will readily admit they are bad at maths, but more professional development time in teacher training and at school level is devoted to mathematical learning and development of this self- efficacy in both the students and teachers through the mandatory greater limits allowed of weekly instruction. Therefore, with less time weekly allocated for the four art forms as a whole in Australian schools, it is imperative that commencing with preservice teachers in creating a positive efficacy in these early teachers' personal beliefs to

sing and to know with constancy of singing, that they can actually sing and improve is a fundamental strategy.

In our limited time within teacher education training, it is crucial to develop preservice teachers' confidence to sing. It is essential for teachers in all stages of education and training to recognize that it is comprehended as acceptable to sing no matter what their own perceptions are, and to encourage the belief that singing is a definite positive attribute where all can feel confident enough to use within the classroom. To encourage development in confidence alone to simply sing, and then to use the tool of singing within their practicum classrooms and ultimately their own future classrooms, not just for verbal literacy, but for their children (and importantly themselves), to experience music for the opportunity to be musically expressive, should be seen as one of high importance if not mandatory as part of their training and then teaching. Subsequently these beliefs and views will then have a greater effect and impact on the way these prospective teachers organize their education acts and the tools of delivery in their classrooms, rather than just knowledge to be obtained.

When teachers become more confident and competent in relation to singing and the positive pedagogical understanding of the utilisation of singing, then they are more likely to use singing and to use it successfully. If teachers want to actively engage their own students in their learning, teachers in all capacities must then do the same with their own learning. Only then will there be more classroom teachers who will sing with their students.

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About the Author

Lyndell Heyning has been a Primary school teacher for 30 years with the last 13 years lecturing at Southern Cross University, predominately in Creative Arts Education in teacher education programs. Her interests have always been concerned with the high importance of the implementation of the arts, in particular Music, from Early Childhood classrooms through to the Primary school curricula. This included producing multi- tiered arts productions in schools involving the engagement of practicing teachers. She now is concentrating on encouraging the next generation of teachers to define the importance and necessity of the arts in schools for themselves. She has authored previous papers in music education and is currently working towards her PHD exploring why practicing teachers attribute diminishing importance of music as an educational tool in the classroom as the child progresses through primary school.

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