

STAR-POST (MUSIC)

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Singapore
Teachers'
Academy
for the
aRts



Evidencing Learning
Making Musical Connections

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STAR-Post (Music) Editorial Team

Leong Siew Chun

Senior Academy Officer, Music

Adeline Tan

Senior Academy Officer, Music

Kelly Tang

Senior Academy Officer, Music

Contributor:

Tan-Chua Siew Ling

Master Teacher (Music)

Published by



Singapore
Teachers'
Academy
for the
Arts

2 Malan Road, Block A,
Singapore 109433

Tel: +65 6664 1561

Fax: +65 6273 9048

STAR Website

STAR Vimeo

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Editorial

In this issue of STAR-Post, we take a closer look at how music teachers can make deeper and more meaningful musical connections with students, through discovering what is on their heart and mind. Where does each student stand in his/her journey of musical discovery? What type of music captures our students' interest and defines their lived experience? What songs speak to their hearts and gives flight to their dreams? What lessons can we curate to allow students to experience the full vitality of musical concepts, and to free their artistic voice? The answer lies in the careful weaving of assessment into our teaching practices, giving us a clearer view of how our students are learning, and how we can teach them better.

This issue begins with a sharing by STAR's OEIR Professor Martin Fautley on assessment in music education and how we reflect on our own classroom practices. We also learn more about the Critical Inquiry journey that some teacher-leaders have taken to broaden their perspectives and think deeper about their teaching processes, to make learning more meaningful for their students.

Additionally, we feature the final instalment of the Singapore Teaching Practice model with respect to Assessment and Feedback - setting meaningful assignments that help check for understanding and ways of providing feedback that aid our students' learning. Our Music Senior Teacher, Mr Shahrin Mahmud also shares his assessment practices in the classroom that encourage the student voice.

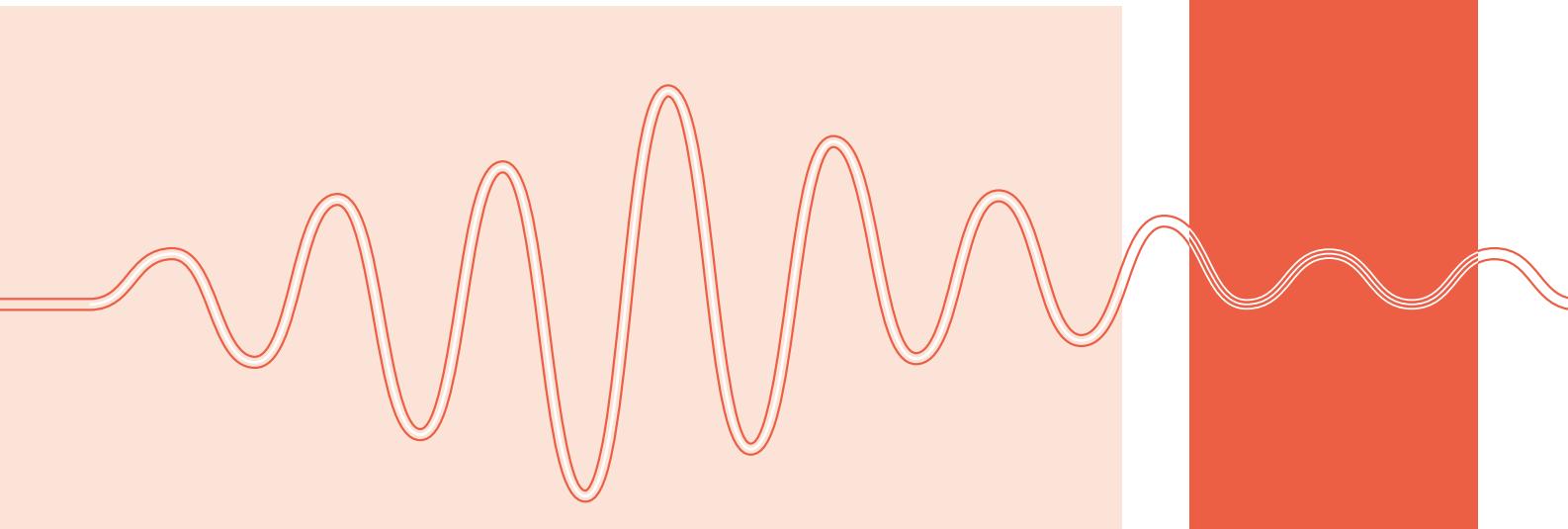
We are excited to work in close partnership with you to bring pedagogy that is relevant and innovative for your music classroom. Based on the overwhelming response to our recent fully-subscribed **Stories We Sing** Seminar, we believe you will continue to make a deep and wonderful impact and influence for quality arts teaching in our music lessons.

Thank you for taking this PD journey with us.

Lee Huan Siak James
Deputy Director, Music
Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts

Listening *for the* Learner's Pulse

STAR takes a fresh look at the critical role of assessment in the teaching and learning of music through the illuminating lens of Professor Martin Fautley, renowned author of the milestone publication *Assessment in Music Education*.

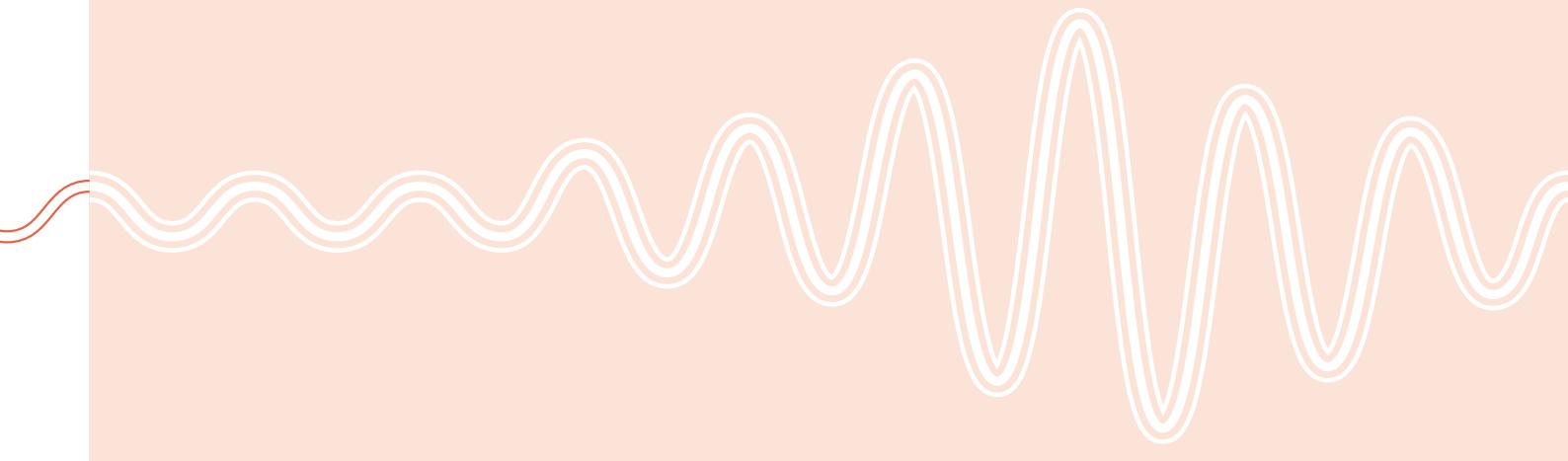


Asessment plays an integral role in effective teaching and learning. Our assessment of our students reflects the things we cherish and value most deeply, such as musical expression or creativity to name a few. This is indicated by the qualities we look out for in our students' learning.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is a process for the teacher to gain a clear situational awareness of his/her students' understanding and development of musical skills. This is important for teachers to plan what to do in the next stage of the students' learning, in order to attain the desired musical impact on their students.



Prof. Martin Fautley addressing the Secondary Music STAR Champions on aspects of Assessment for Learning



STAR invited Outstanding Educator In Residence (OEIR), Professor Martin Fautley, Director of Research in the School of Education and Social Work at Birmingham City University, to explore key issues regarding assessment with our music teachers. He spoke on the purpose of assessment and the importance of centering its purpose on improving our students' learning. This was covered in a series of workshops for both the Primary and Secondary STAR Champions (2-4 May 2018) as well as a lecture on Assessment in Music Education held on 4 May 2018.

Professor Fautley shares his views on assessment in music education in this interview.

STAR: Prof. Fautley, could you describe how we can assess musical creativity in students?

Prof. Martin Fautley: This is a really good question! For me, there are two really important questions to ask, these are:

- Who is the assessment for?
- What will we do with the results?

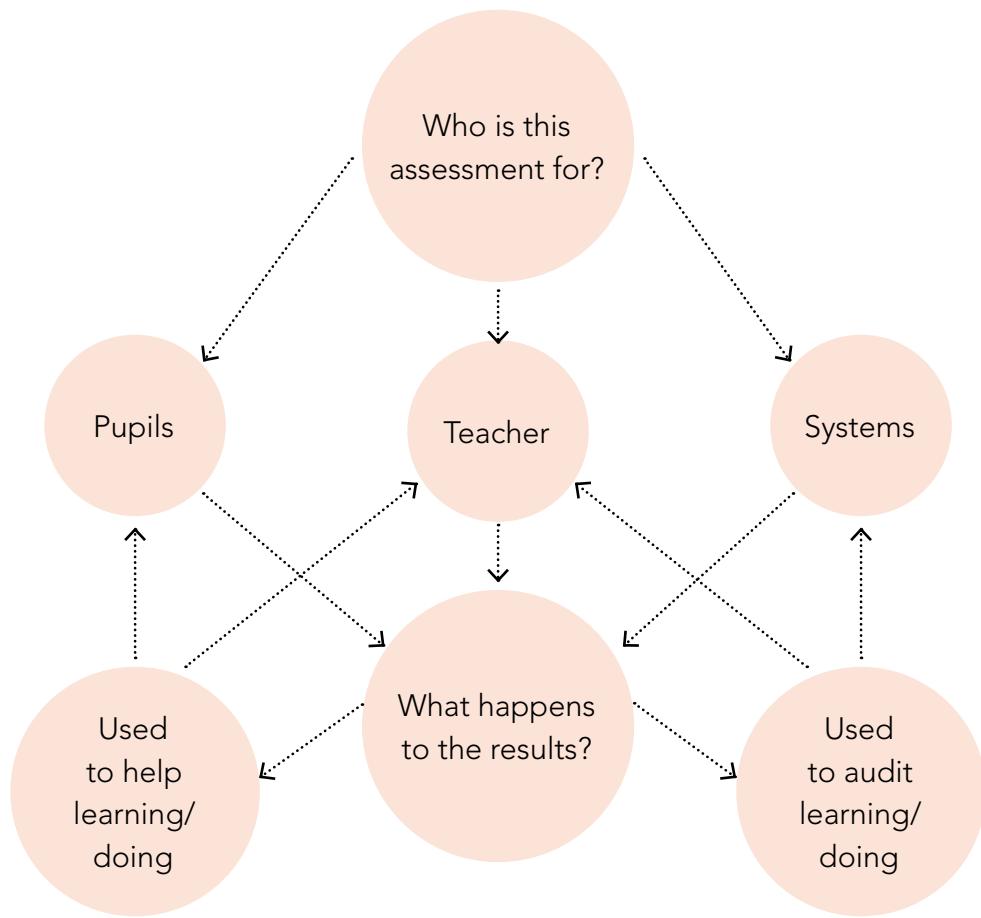
In many ways, these questions are related. Let's start with a counter-example.

Suppose you tell a learner they have a creativity score of 48%.

- What does that actually mean?
- What would a score of 100% creativity mean?
- How can the 48% learner improve?
- What can you do as a teacher to help them improve?

You can probably see this is not very helpful, either for the teacher or the pupils! So who is the assessment for?

There seem to me to be three main reasons for this, as I wrote about in my book on assessment in music education (Fautley, 2010). I also drew a diagram:



What this diagram shows is that there are two main reasons for assessment, to *help* learning and doing, or to *audit* learning and doing. Most music teachers want to help their pupils, and so the assessments that they make are undertaken with this in mind.

So to go back to the original question, how to assess musical creativity? I think we need to think why we are doing it, and how it (and we) will help the pupils as a result. Viewing it like this has proved helpful for many teachers, as it takes it away from being solely an assessment issue, and becomes one of teaching and learning, which teachers normally feel much more equipped to deal with.



Prof. Martin Fautley discussing lesson ideas with a music teacher at the Primary Music Star Champions workshop

What does it mean to assess musical learning in a manner that is 'musical'?

This is another really good question! Sometimes I think as music education professionals, we shy away from making qualitative judgements about 'being musical', and instead we focus on the technical details:

Is the phrasing correct?
Is the fingering appropriate?
Is it in tune?
Does it start and stop properly?

And so on.

But we can make musical judgements, and we can also share these with our learners, even if they are hard to quantify.

A useful experiment is to try this with a class you have a good rapport with. Ask them to perform, say, their group pieces, and then ask the rest of the class to describe the musicality or musicianship of the performances. You may well find that their views accord with yours, even if none of you can actually pinpoint exactly what musicality is! Maybe give it a try?

I am also reminded of one of Janet Mills' observations:

...I certainly do not think something such as

SKILLS + INTERPRETATION = PERFORMANCE

– Mills, 2005, p. 176.

There is a saying that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts", and this is certainly true in assessment terms. If we break down some learners' musical offerings into a series of assessed components, we might miss something, that 'spark', that 'magic', which somehow lifts a piece. We can count the trees, but we miss the forest!

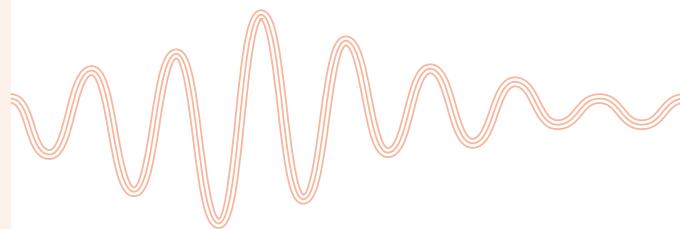
So I think, to assess music "musically", we need to think about a number of factors simultaneously, and not try to divide these up too much. And, perhaps we can be a bit more daring in challenging learners to think about whether we need to classify and quantify a musical observation in order for it to exist. There is a nice part in the book *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance* where the author says:

.... if you can't say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really does exist. What else are the grades based on?

– Pirsig, 1974, p. 187.

This, to me, sums up the issue for us in music education quite nicely!

"If we break down some learners' musical offerings into a series of assessed components, we might miss something, that 'spark', that 'magic', which somehow lifts a piece."





Prof. Martin Fautley with participants at his lecture on Assessment in Music Education

“We need to think about what (musical) understanding actually means and relate this to an ever-widening range of styles and genres, as well as the ubiquitous nature of all music being available instantly.”

Finally, Prof. Fautley, what do you feel are the key issues and challenges of assessing students' musical understanding in the 21st century classroom?

I think that there are many pressures on us in the 21st century classroom that we as music educators need to think about and take into account in our teaching and learning.

We need to think about what understanding actually means and relate this to an ever-widening range of styles and genres, as well as the ubiquitous nature of all music being available instantly. So, we need to think about how our learners evidence their understandings in the music they themselves produce, especially their original songs and compositions. That's our challenge as music educators!

Fautley, M. (2010). *Assessment in music education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mills, J. (2005). *Music in the school*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pirsig, R. (1974). *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance*. London: Vintage.

What do we know about Critical Inquiry ?

STAR explores the critical inquiry journey that grows our teachers as reflective learners, as they undergo a process of gathering and evaluating information, ideas from multiple sources to documenting observations, leading to new knowledge and applications.

From 2016, 19 music teacher-leaders have grown as reflective practitioners through their participation in a Critical Inquiry Networked Learning Community (CI NLC). The CI NLC provided a purposeful, supportive and sustained environment for our teacher-leaders to engage in critical discourse to stimulate and inspire further pedagogical ideas and critical reflection, as they conducted their CI projects in their respective music classrooms over a 4 to 6 month period.

The CI journey, guided by a Master Teacher (Music), was an enriching one as it provided teachers with a transformative learning experience¹ which impacted their teaching beliefs and practices.

¹ **Transformative learning** is introduced by Mezirow in 1978 as effecting change in a frame of reference. It focussed on the centrality of experience, critical reflection and rational discourse. Illeris, in 2014, defined transformative learning as learning that implies changes in the identity of the learner so that there is a change in understanding, a way of behaviour, or a mode of experience.

The CI journey begins with our NLC of teacher-leaders engaging in literature reviews and interactive dialogues to inject greater understanding of their chosen area of inquiry such as assessment or technology. These discussions form a critical platform for the teachers to inform them of current music practices and pedagogical approaches as they exchange perspectives in the context of their schools and music lessons.

Immersive Context

Hearing about new techniques, research papers presented, learning from thought leaders and practitioners in the music field, can bring exciting possibilities to expand knowledge. When our teachers attend conferences and symposiums as part of the CI journey, they are challenged to think beyond their interest area.

One example of a symposium that our teachers attended was the 7th International Symposium on Assessment in Music Education, during which they got to hear about various research and findings from international presenters. Some of the presentations included the use of assessments in cooperative settings, student self-evaluation, assessment rubric design and so on. The wide array of topics stretched our teachers' perspectives to make new connections.

Post-discussions are held daily during study trips where the members of the NLC would reflect on their take-aways and share with each other their learnings, encouraging cross-fertilisation of ideas.



Delegate of Teacher-Leaders with the Chairs of the 7th International Symposium on Assessment in Music Education, Prof. Timothy S. Brophy from the University of Florida and Prof. Martin Fautley from Birmingham City University

“Feedback is an important process in student learning. However, my past experiences have shown that students face difficulties in providing quality feedback that goes beyond ‘this was a good/ bad performance’. Are students able to be more musically specific in their feedback? I am keen to find out how student-student feedback in the music classroom can be improved through different facilitation strategies, with focus on questioning techniques.”

Lim Hui Wen Jwen
Music Teacher • Woodgrove Secondary School

Improving Student-Student Feedback
Using Socrative Questioning, Accountable Task and Construction of Politics

By Lim Hui Wen Jwen
Woodgrove Secondary School

Feedback is an important process in student learning. However, my past experiences have shown that students face difficulties in providing quality feedback that goes beyond ‘this was a good/ bad performance’. Are students able to be more musically specific in their feedback? I am keen to find out how student-student feedback in the music classroom can be improved through different facilitation strategies, with focus on questioning techniques.

RESEARCH PURPOSE
To research on how different questioning strategies can facilitate students in giving more musically specific feedback in a music classroom.

QUESTION

1. How do facilitation strategies influence students giving more musically specific feedback in a music classroom?
2. How do students respond to different questioning strategies in a music classroom? Using Socrative, Accountable Task, and Construction of Politics.

FACILITATION STRATEGIES

- Socrative Questioning is an online application that facilitates teachers in creating and displaying questions for students to answer online in real-time.
- Accountable Task is a teaching strategy that requires students to take responsibility for their work by making it public.
- Construction of Politics is a teaching strategy that involves students in the process of researching and evidence-based decision-making.

Examination Questions

- a. Define the classification – “What does one mean by...”
- b. Develop the first or an accurate opinion – “What do you think about...?”
- c. Explain the process of reasoning and evidence – “Why do you think...?”
- d. Share alternative responses and perspectives – “What are other ways of thinking about...?”
- e. Consider the implications and consequences – “What would happen if...?”
- f. Connect the new information to what we knew before – “How does this connect to what we knew before? Why do you think I asked this question?”
- g. Summarise – “What is the main point?”

[Click here to
read more about
“Improving Student-
Student Feedback”](#)



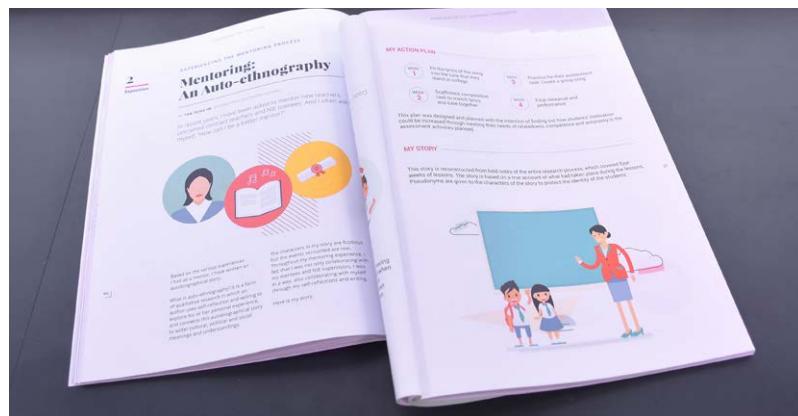
One of the daily post-discussions during the study trip

After the conference, the teacher-leaders continue their readings and envision possibilities in their classrooms. This makes for a meaningful learning experience that springs our teacher-leaders to begin their inquiry into their teaching practices.

Investigations in the Classroom

The next stage of the journey begins the investigations stemming from an idea or learning inspired by the conference. With the guidance of the Master Teacher, our teacher-leaders trial their ideas, document actions, collect data, reflect and refine pedagogical decisions made to improve their classroom practice.

The approach to the CI can take many different forms. The choice is reflective of the teacher's CI intent and how the approach might best present the findings, resulting in interesting presentations. It could take the form of a research, reflective journal, video coding etc.



An ethnographic approach to conducting a critical inquiry

NLC Meet-ups

In NLC meet-ups, teachers share and discuss updates of their individual projects to fellow members. The teachers benefit from the rich discussions amongst themselves as they pool in their diverse expertise and experiences. Each member offers a critical eye to further refine the project, offer suggestions, question gaps and provide the positive support.



Teachers in discussion during a session as part of the CI NLC

Presentation, Reflection and Celebration

As the journey draws to a close, the teacher-leaders present their CI project to other music teachers of the fraternity at a mini-symposium. It reveals the inquiry journey, how they documented their observations, what their reflections and findings were. This professional knowledge is also shared in a series of compendiums entitled,

- [**Sounding the Teaching: Examining Music Learning Experiences**](#)
- [**Sounding the Teaching II: Supporting and Evidencing Music Learning,**](#)

further generating professional knowledge that reaches out beyond the attendees at the symposium.

“Evidencing learning for me used to be a very practical thing, something that I did in order to find out where my students were and to some extent, how to move them forward. This journey has made me more aware of the deeper implications of assessment: the assumptions and biases...and also the choice of processes when planning assessment.”

Liu Jia Yuen Claire
Music Teacher • Catholic High School (Secondary)



Tan Keng Hong from Canberra Primary sharing his CI project at a mini-symposium



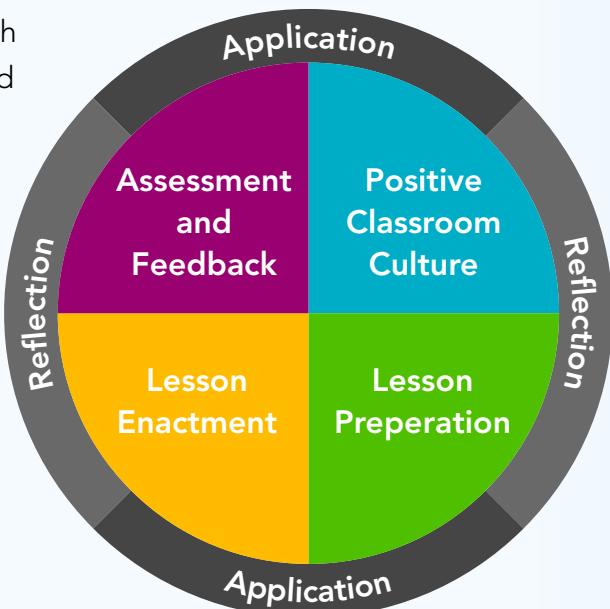
Infographic presentation of Critical Inquiry findings

In closing, the CI helps the fraternity to not only broaden music perspectives, but also equip them with music pedagogies.

Singapore Teaching Practice – Assessment and Feedback

The final installment of the STP model looking at assessment and feedback in the music classroom.

The Singapore Teaching Practice (STP) makes explicit how effective teaching and learning is achieved in Singapore schools. Pedagogical Practices (PP), a component of the STP, comprises four fundamental teaching processes. Two of the processes, positive classroom culture and lesson enactment, have been discussed in the past two issues of STAR-Post. We now examine the process of assessment and feedback through examples from actual music classroom practices observed over these few years.



The Four Fundamental Teaching Processes

Checking for understanding and providing feedback

Checking for understanding is about determining the gap between students' current understanding and desired learning outcomes. Providing feedback aims to close this gap between where the student is and where the student should be, in relation to the lesson objectives.

Teachers should be aware that they reinforce in students, a fixed mindset or growth mindset (Dweck, 2009) through their feedback.

A fixed mindset assumes that talents and abilities are fixed. A growth mindset, on the other hand, believes that talents and abilities could be developed. Hence, a growth mindset will encourage a passion for learning, active seeking of challenges, valuing of effort, and resilience to persist in the face of adversity (p. 175). In fostering a growth mindset in students, the feedback process should be one of understanding rather than from a judging standpoint, and teachers need to create an environment where mistakes are acceptable, and feedback is used to help students learn from their mistakes.

Here are some suggestions drawn from Deutsch (2017) in the context of discussing music composition with students, which might help foster a growth mindset:

- Use a supportive and optimistic tone of voice
- Begin and end with positive comments
- Differentiate between objective and subjective elements.
For example, the phrase 'you might consider' could be used to discuss subjective elements
- Phrase some comments in a form of questions
- Highlight emerging success when addressing problems

In a music lesson, some teaching actions that check for understanding and provide feedback could include:



Apply and show

In large group music-making activities, the process of checking for understanding is about observing students' ability to respond with accuracy and fluency, by applying and demonstrating their musical understandings.



Tune-In with Echo of Rhythms by Foo Ern-I Kimberley of Anglican High School

This video illustrates a tune-in activity where Foo Ern-I Kimberley of Anglican High School has students echoing and imitating her as she introduced simple to complex rhythmic patterns with body percussion.

Insert hyperlink



Facilitating with questions

Teachers could facilitate questions when checking students' musical understandings, or probing into their creative work such as through the following:

- Clarification and explanations
 - Explain... Could you elaborate?*
- Justification of proposals and challenges
 - Where did you find the information?*
- Recognise and challenge conceptions
 - Why did you say...?*
 - How can we make this better/more musical/more interesting?*
- Ask for evidence for claims and arguments
 - Can you give an example?*
- Interpret and use another's statements
 - Student XX suggested... what do you think?*



Giving Choices by Loo Teng Kiat of Zhenghua Primary School

The above is a short excerpt that illustrates how Loo Teng Kiat of Zhenghua Primary School facilitated a discussion of students' creative work with questions, providing them with choices, and valuing their suggestions so that they are able to make musical decisions independently.



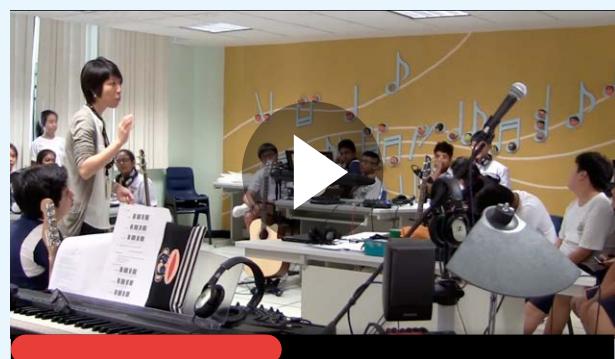
Questioning by Lee Shu Hui Denise of National Junior College

Here is a short excerpt that illustrates how Lee Shu Hui Denise of National Junior College facilitated a discussion of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony through questions. She sought clarification in students' responses and extended their learning by plugging their knowledge gaps. In the next part of the lesson, she used questions to generate ideas of how students could develop their motivic ideas in their compositions.



Consolidating students' learning

Teachers provide feedback to consolidate students' learning at the end of the lesson. Such feedback could reiterate the key points so that students could focus on the key learning which would guide them on their next activity.



Consolidating Students' Learning by Tan Li Jen Adeline, formerly from Bishan Park Secondary School

This video illustrates how Tan Li Jen Adeline, formerly from Bishan Park Secondary School, provided feedback to the students after their group performances at mid-point check. She identified the musical issues that the groups had demonstrated in their performances and facilitated a reflection on how these issues could be resolved.

Supporting self-directed learning

Self-directed learning entails initiating personally challenging activities and developing the knowledge and skills to overcome the challenges successfully (Gibbons, 2002). In supporting self-directed learning, the teacher needs to take into account the students' level of readiness, and to provide clear instructions, sufficient resources, and a specific scope of learning for students.

In a music lesson, the following teaching actions could support self-directed learning in students

Constructing a shared understanding of assessment rubrics

A set of assessment rubrics might not be interpreted in the same way by students. Hence, teachers could create a shared understanding of rubrics by:

- Co-constructing the criteria with students
- Comparing the students' evaluation with the teacher's evaluation.

For examples of the above, please refer to:

The screenshot shows the first page of the research project. It includes the title 'Empowering Students through Negotiating and Understanding Performance Benchmarks', the author's name 'Sharon Ng Wai Yee', and the school 'Guangyang Primary School'. The page contains sections for 'QUESTION', 'LITERATURE REVIEW', 'METHODLOGY', and 'My Journey Lesson 1'. The 'QUESTION' section asks 'How can students be empowered to take ownership of their learning through negotiating and understanding performance benchmarks?' The 'LITERATURE REVIEW' section discusses the concept of self-directed learning and its importance. The 'METHODLOGY' section describes the research process, including negotiations and student research. The 'My Journey Lesson 1' section provides a video link and a summary of the lesson.

'Empowering students through negotiating and understanding performance benchmarks' by Sharon Ng Wai Yee, Head of Department, Music & Aesthetics, Guangyang Primary School

The screenshot shows the first page of the research project. It includes the title 'Comparing Students' Evaluation and Teacher's Evaluation of Group Performances', the author's name 'Tan Keng Hong', and the school 'Canberra Primary School'. The page contains sections for 'RESEARCH PURPOSE', 'LITERATURE REVIEW', 'HYPOTHESIS', and 'QUESTION'. The 'QUESTION' section asks 'How do student peer evaluation and teacher evaluation differ in the assessment of group performances?' The 'LITERATURE REVIEW' section discusses the concept of self-directed learning and its importance. The 'HYPOTHESIS' section states that students' evaluations of their own group performances would be more positive than those of their teacher. The 'QUESTION' section asks how student peer evaluation and teacher evaluation differ in the assessment of group performances.

'Comparing students' evaluation and teacher's evaluation of group performances' by Tan Keng Hong, Music Teacher, Canberra Primary School

Song-writers' Circle

Teachers could have groups of students exchanging feedback. For example, a group of students perform their song creation and state their musical challenge or their problem. The rest of the groups are to offer suggestions to help the group deal with their musical challenge or problem.

Setting meaningful assignments

Setting meaningful assignments is about planning tasks that have differing levels of difficulty and that cater to different student profiles, so that students could be challenged to think critically and creatively.

In music lessons, these assignments could have students working in groups to create their own covers, or to create their own compositions based on parameters set by the teacher.



Ministry of Education

Students Group Work by Students at Nan Chiau High School

This video illustrates how students could work independently on their composition and develop various skills on their own when given the space to do so.

For further examples of setting meaningful assignments through creating covers and compositional tasks, please refer to the articles:

Authentic Assessment Tasks in Group Work

PURPOSE
The purpose of this research is to examine how pupils' experiences in group work can be used to inform the development of assessment tasks.

QUESTION
How do students experience group work? How does group work affect their assessment tasks?

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION
Authentic assessment tasks are those that are meaningful to students and reflect real-life situations. They are designed to assess students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a meaningful way.

LITERATURE REVIEW
A literature review is provided to support the research findings.

METHODS
The project is a descriptive research. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. The results show that group work can be a positive experience for students, but it can also be challenging. Some students enjoy working in groups, while others prefer to work individually. The research also found that group work can help students develop social skills and improve their academic performance.

ASSIGNMENT TASK
The assignment task involves creating a group project that reflects the research findings. Students will be asked to work in groups to complete the task.

Motivating Primary 6 Students through Differentiated Tasks

RATIONALE AND CONTEXT
The rationale for this research is to examine how differentiated tasks can motivate primary 6 students to learn effectively. The context is that primary 6 students are facing the challenges of the PSLE, which can be stressful for them. The research aims to identify effective ways to motivate these students through differentiated tasks.

WHY DIFFERENTIATION?
Differentiation is important because we want all students to succeed, not just the ones who are already at the top.

WHAT PRIMARY 6 STUDENTS?
Primary 6 students are unique in that they have different learning styles and abilities. Some may be more visual learners, while others may be more auditory or kinesthetic learners.

Differentiation is guided by three characteristics of effective teaching: relevance, engagement, and challenge.

Differentiation provides multiple ways for students to learn, engage, and demonstrate their understanding. It allows students to work at their own pace and level, and it promotes a sense of ownership and pride in their work.

QUESTION
1) What did you like most about the differentiated tasks?
2) Which aspect of the differentiated tasks did you find most challenging?
3) How do these differentiated tasks benefit your learning?

'Authentic assessment tasks in group work' by Ng Eng Kee in *Sounding the Teaching: Examining music learning experiences* (Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts, 2017)

'Motivating P6 students through differentiated tasks' by Eng Yan Chen Alvyn in *Sounding the Teaching II: Supporting and evidencing music learning* (Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts, 2018)

Deutsch, D. (2016). Authentic Assessment in Music Composition. *Music Educators Journal*. 102(3), p.53-59

Dweck, C. S. (2009). Mindsets: Developing talent through a growth mindset. *Olympic Coach*, 21(1), 4-7. Retrieved from <http://garyhorvath.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/USOC-MINDSETS-by-Carol-Dweck-2.09.pdf>

Gibbons, M. (2002). *The self-directed learning handbook: Challenging adolescent students to excel*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts. (2018). *Sounding the teaching II: Supporting and evidencing music learning*. Singapore: Ministry of Education.

Musical Conversation

STAR takes a look behind the music classroom practices that incorporate Assessment for Learning.



Shahrin bin Mahmud
Senior Teacher (Music),
Greenridge Primary School

Teachers at Greenridge Primary School adopt the **Gradual Release of Responsibility** instructional framework. The school is committed to engaging students through the use of formative assessment strategies that would enable students to learn collaboratively and become self-directed learners. Having a keen interest in student development and strong advocate for student learning, Shahrin shares how he encourages students' voice in his daily lessons.

Teacher Responsibility

Focused Instruction

"I do it"

Guided Instruction

"We do it"

Collaborative Learning

"You do it together"

Independent Learning

"You do it alone"

Student Responsibility

The **Gradual Release of Responsibility** instructional framework purposefully shifts the cognitive load from teacher-as-model, to joint responsibility of teacher and learner, to independent practice and application by the learner
(Pearson & Gallagher, 1983)

The Gradual Release of Responsibility Framework¹

¹ Fisher, D. and Frey, D. (2014). *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching: A Framework for Gradual Release of Responsibility*. VA: ASCD. 3.



Shahrin performing a song for his students

STAR:

Can you share with us what your music lessons look like on a typical day?

Shahrin bin Mahmud:

I usually begin by modelling.

For example, if the lesson involves learning chords on the ukulele, I will first play the song I want to teach. This action develops the students' sensitivity to music, as it prepares them to listen, draw their attention to what is happening in the music, and understand music.

I then invite the students to join in the playing of the ukulele. Once they have learnt the basics, I will put them in small groups to practice. In these groups, students learn collaboratively, which builds their confidence, eventually preparing them to be able to play on their own.

Are there certain ways of teaching that lend themselves well to students' musical voice?

The role of the teacher today, is one of a facilitator. He is not a holder of all knowledge who dictates the students' learning. Thus in my class, I make it a point to encourage my students to explore and try out new ideas. They may all be learning the same thing, but through their exploration, they may find different ways of playing and expressing themselves. The key is to enable our students to think critically and understand how and why they made those musical decisions and its effectiveness.

One way of creating a safe environment that encourages student exploration is through small group settings. When students work and discuss in their groups, it creates opportunities for students to reflect on what and how they have learnt.



Student sharing new ideas with classmates

I understand you were part of the Critical Inquiry Networked Learning Community which attended the 32nd International Society for Music Education World Conference in Glasgow, Scotland. Can you share one experience that impacted you at the conference?

I attended a workshop entitled: *Drum Works* by Beer, Wills & McDouall (2016) from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, UK. At that workshop, I learnt about a community drumming project that provided opportunities for students to develop leadership skills as they mentor other students.

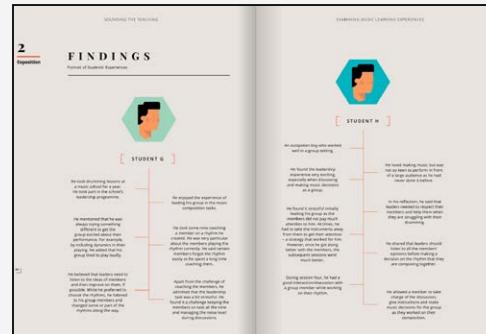
I was inspired to conduct a similar community drumming project in my school and investigate how my students take on leadership roles, and how their experiences helped grow them as student leaders.

How has this Critical Inquiry (CI) project informed your teaching practice?

Teachers play a critical role in developing student leadership. And the music classroom provides avenues to do just that, especially through music composition.

Composing in groups encompasses shared learning that allows students to explore, negotiate, reflect and refine each other's musical ideas. It provides opportunities for students to take turns to lead and facilitate discussions.

In my CI project, I pre-selected leaders based on their leadership potential. I provided them with strategies to manage and facilitate group discussions and these helped contribute to the success of the learning outcomes. However, I also learnt that we cannot ignore innate leadership abilities and sometimes, we need to allow these 'emerging leaders' to develop naturally within the group. The idea is about shared leadership.



Read more about Shahrin's CI project on 'Student leadership development through community drumming' in Sounding the Teaching: Examining music learning experiences (2017), which sheds light on students' perception of their leadership experiences how these experiences builds leadership skills such as group facilitation and management skills.

Your school strongly encourages the use of formative assessment strategies. Can you share how you use Assessment for Learning (AfL) in your music classroom?

The idea behind AfL is to find out what my students know, and what are the gaps to fill. This will inform me how to plan my next move, whether I would need to address any misconceptions or move on to the next stage of learning.

I often use the *Blickers* app to check my students' understanding. The app allows me to collate students' responses by register numbers. It is a quick survey for me to check whether the majority of the class has understood that particular concept I am teaching.

If there are misconceptions to be addressed, instead of the teacher providing the answers, I would invite a student who got the correct answer (based on the responses captured by the app) to share and explain how he/she came to that answer. This not only releases the responsibility of learning from the teacher to the student, it also builds students' confidence and encourages participation in class.

In AfL, peer feedback is just as crucial, if not more meaningful, to the students. There was one activity where I got the class to cover a song of their choice. And I uploaded their covers online. I had already provided feedback to the students to improve their work, but I also got the students to vote for their favourite cover. In addition, they had to share their reasons for their choice and give suggestions on how the groups can improve further. I stressed to the students, it was about providing a solution, rather than pointing out what was wrong.

From this activity, it was evident that the students appreciated their peers' feedback which spurred them to better their work.



Shahrin engaging in song and movement alongside his students

You recently opened your classroom as part of the Learning Journey for the Senior Teacher/Lead Teacher Programme. What are some your take-aways from this experience?

Over time, our community of Music Senior Teachers has grown and developed a culture of peer learning. We are open to each other's feedback and happy to try suggestions to better our teaching.

At the Learning Journey, the Senior Teachers observed two of my lessons for the same level. At the end of the first lesson, the teachers gave me fresh ideas which I then reviewed and incorporated into my second lesson. With the changes, the teachers saw a very different second lesson while achieving the same lesson objectives.

That's the advantage of having peer review. And how I wish we can do this more often; to have the time to study each other's lessons. While it can be daunting, it is good to have culture of sharing

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It is not about critiquing, but about learning from each other
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Could you share your hopes for the music fraternity?

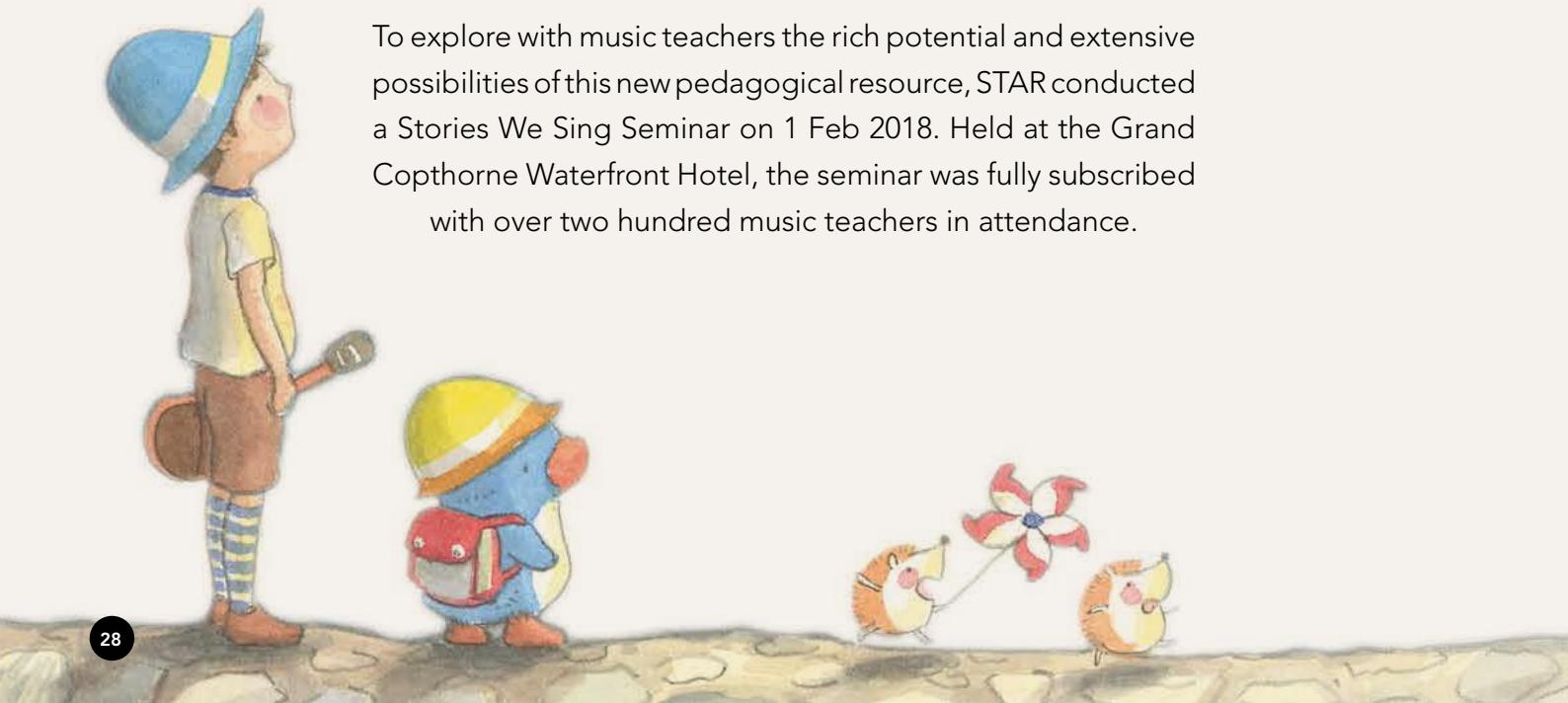
I hope that we can build a culture that promotes sharing; to trust our fraternity to offer constructive feedback as we open our classrooms. Because, each of us brings different lenses and experiences that can help us reflect on our teaching practices, and in the process, build ourselves to be even better teachers.

Weaving New Stories through Song

Over 200 music teachers who attended STAR's Stories We Sing Seminar on 1 Feb 2018 received insights and explored creative ideas on how to ignite their students' imagination, using a set of twelve newly-commissioned songs about the Singapore lived experience.

In November 2017, STAR officially launched Stories We Sing, an exciting pedagogical resource featuring twelve newly commissioned songs by Singaporean composers and lyricists. Bristling with lesson ideas that present our contemporary lived experience in Singapore as the focus for music teaching, the Stories We Sing illustrated book and audio CD were distributed to all MOE schools in Singapore in January 2018.

To explore with music teachers the rich potential and extensive possibilities of this new pedagogical resource, STAR conducted a Stories We Sing Seminar on 1 Feb 2018. Held at the Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel, the seminar was fully subscribed with over two hundred music teachers in attendance.





The Stories We Sing Seminar starts off on a high note

The event started with an inspiring opening address by Mrs Chua Yen Ching, Deputy Director-General of Education (Professional Development) and Executive Director, Academy of Singapore Teachers, emphasising the significant role of music education in the holistic development of students. This was followed by a feature address by Ms Anita Kuan, Deputy Principal, Temasek Polytechnic, outlining the importance for our society to tell its stories through songs, as well as other means of artistic expression.



Mrs Chua Yen Ching giving her inspirational welcome address



Ms Anita Kuan, Deputy Principal, Temasek Polytechnic, speaks to music teachers on Defining Lived Experience Through Storytelling

Following an overview of *Stories We Sing*'s main features and pedagogical framing, the participants attended their choice of eight concurrent sessions, each focussing on individual songs from the album, and exploring creative ways of engaging students using the songs. The sessions were led by STAR's master teachers and academy officers, together with music teachers from the Pedagogical Songs Networked Learning Community that designed and trialled the lesson ideas. The seminar ended on a high note with a musicking session featuring two illustrious composers of the *Stories We Sing* album: Art Fazil and Ghanavenothon Retnam.



Creating new Carnatic rhythms using the song *Vaazhway Olli Theebamay*



Working out the harmonies on the ukulele for the song *Telok Blangah*





Learning the song *Ying Xing De Xue* through the Orff Approach



Moving to the pulse of the song *Telok Blangah*

The *Stories We Sing* Seminar poses an exciting challenge to music teachers to continue the storytelling with their students through creating new songs about our life and culture in Singapore. *Stories We Sing* is but a precursor, a catalyst to spawn a greater multiplicity of musical expressions in our classrooms and beyond, giving voice to the burgeoning musical tapestry of our vibrant nation.



Closing musicking session with two of the *Stories We Sing* composers – Art Fazil and Ghanavenothan Retnam

Music Teachers Share their Experience at the *Stories We Sing* Seminar

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Having had the privilege of performing two of the songs from Stories We Sing at ‘Friends in Concert’ in 2017, I felt a deep connection to the ideas shared at the Stories We Sing Seminar. It is always exciting when one embarks on a new journey of learning and this is what the Stories We Sing Seminar offered. Like an innovative new automobile design, there was a tremendous buzz about the Stories We Sing resource among the fraternity from its early stages to its launch, and everyone wanted to take it for a spin.

This leads me to an exciting aspect of the Stories We Sing Seminar, where music teachers were invited and challenged to add their own unique spin to the given lesson ideas and resources. This gives room for the true musical personality of each teacher to be expressed in the music classroom, which is when students feel the deepest connection to the lesson, and the greatest passion for their learning.”

Muhammad Dzuhri Bin Juniwan
Music Teacher • Bukit View Primary School

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“The Stories We Sing seminar was one of the most enriching seminars my colleagues and I have attended. To acquire more pedagogies for the different songs, my colleagues and I decided to split ourselves up to attend different concurrent sessions within the same time slot, so we could share our learning with one another later.

During the concurrent sessions, the facilitators were very enthusiastic in sharing their interesting lesson ideas and pedagogies with us. Through the fun and engaging activities, we learnt the songs and pedagogies easily and quickly. We hope that more of such similar workshops will be available for us to learn and share within the music fraternity.”

Amy Ng
Senior Teacher • Music, Raffles Girls’ Primary School

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“It was such a privilege to attend the Stories We Sing Seminar. This is an incredibly exciting development that all music teachers will indubitably look back on as an important milestone in the history of music pedagogy in Singapore. The collection speaks to my students on a very relatable level as they were written by Singaporean composers and lyricists about our shared home, and truly reflects how our humble fishing village has evolved into a sprawling cosmopolitan city that still retains its kampong spirit.

What is unique about this seminar is that this is not simply about a collection of songs, but also about a sharing of creative pedagogical ideas on how to engage students with these songs – a treasure for us music teachers!”

Ong Shi Qing Melissa
Music Teacher • Hai Sing Catholic School

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“Through the Stories We Sing Seminar, I witnessed the power of songs in bringing together people from different backgrounds who did not know each other previously. When everyone in my small group started learning and singing Dui Shou, there was an immediate sense of belonging. During the musicking session at the end of the seminar, all the seminar participants sang Dui Shou again as a big group. Indeed, I could feel the power of song and its potential for inculcating the ‘Singapore spirit’ in the classroom.

During the seminar, I also learnt pedagogies from teacher-leaders which I have applied in my lessons since. A big thank you to STAR for the great ideas and resources in Stories We Sing. It is truly a great gift to Singapore music teachers and students and will be for many generations to come.”

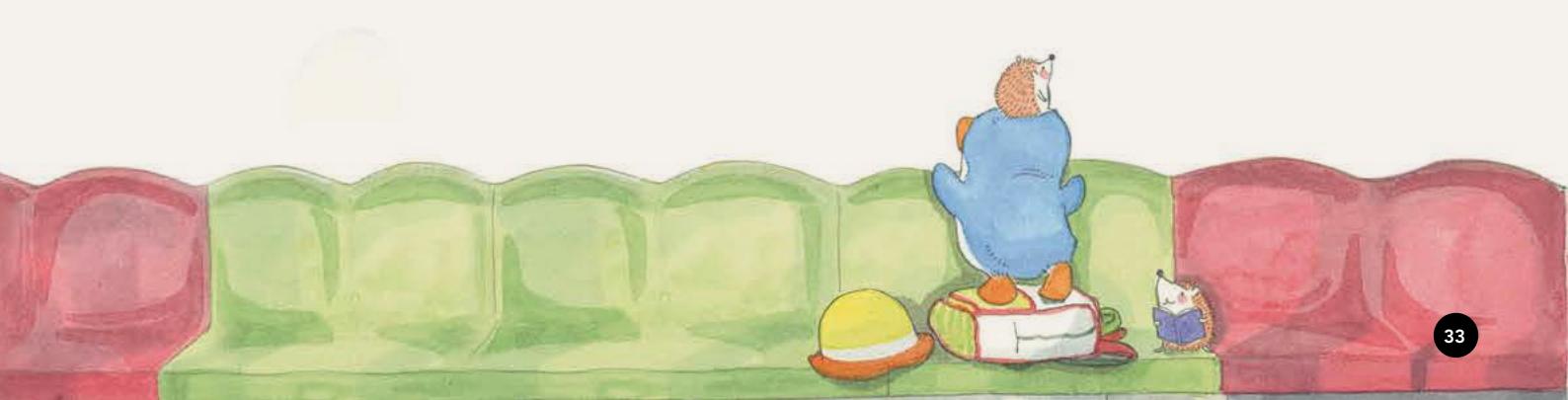
Hazel Lim
Subject Head, Aesthetics • Singapore Chinese Girls' School

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[Click to listen to the album](#)

Stories We Sing

PLAYLIST



STAR Highlights

Another semester of new musical experiences with STAR.

We've put together a roundup of highlights that have taken place



Participants of the Teaching Living Legends workshop with Culture Bearer Riduan Zalani (Jan 2018)



Activating the body and mind for singing in the Engaging with Songs programme (Jan 2018)



Preparation before playing on the Orff mallets in the Orff Approach for Student-Centric Music Lessons (Mar 2018)



Teachers performing in the afternoon Soirée as part of the Music Teacher Practitioner Programme (Mar 2018)



Putting musical ideas to notation in the Music Beginning Teacher Programme: Music Teaching Through the Lens of the Singapore Teaching Practice (Feb 2018)



Experiencing the relationship between space, time and energy through movement in the Dalcroze Approach for Student-Centric Music Lessons with OEIR Jack Stevenson (Apr 2018)



Keeping time through games with Lucinda Geoghegan in the Kodály Approach to Student-Centric Music Lessons (May 2018)



Using Musicking Cards in music improvisation during the Primary STAR Champions Programme (May 2018)



Secondary STAR Champions musicking with OEIR Paul Griffiths, using the non-formal approach to music teaching (Feb 2018)

Arts for the Future: Intersections and Transformation

Arts Education Conference 2018 • Thursday, 8 November

Save the date!

Arts Education Conference (AEC) 2018, co-organised by STAR and AEB, invites* art, music, drama and dance teachers to join us on this one-day learning experience and professional exchange. The conference theme *Arts for the Future: Intersections and Transformation* opens a space for us to examine creativity in the arts and the potential of the arts to facilitate engagement, innovation, and optimism for the future.

AEC 2018 will include keynote addresses, subject spotlights, panel discussion, masterclasses and concurrent sessions by international and local thought leaders, researchers, artists and educators. We will also showcase presentations by music teachers sharing their research findings on innovative pedagogical approaches and practices.

The learning sessions and showcase are curated based on 3 strands that expand on the conference theme of intersections and transformation.



Intersections in Disciplines

Arts educators are lifelong learners who take advantage of new knowledge to design rich learning experiences for our students. We seek intersectional ideas and forward-looking perspectives by exploring connections with other disciplines and leveraging on technology-based innovations.

Our ability to imagine myriad of possibilities and find uncharted connections could inspire new ways of knowing and teaching the arts. In turn, our students are encouraged to develop dispositions that value multiple perspectives, and a spirit of exploration and innovation in a digital world.

Networks and Partnerships

Arts educators situate in an ecology of networks and participatory cultures, which provide stimulating environments for a growth mindset. Through professional exchange, collaborations, and partnerships, the arts fraternity becomes a collective of professional capital built over time to enrich teaching and learning. Creative capacities are further strengthened with the purposeful participation of local arts communities and creative industries. Such networks and cultures facilitate generative processes, and create powerful and sustainable means for deeper conversations to impact and influence the teaching of the arts in our classrooms.

Arts as Catalyst for Change

A critical dimension of professionalism, teacher agency actively shapes how arts educators champion arts teaching to play a significant contribution in nurturing the whole child, and impacting and influencing communities. We believe in the power of the arts to move beyond the aesthetics into work that enables individuals and communities to effect change, whether in attitude or in action. In light of social and cultural globalisation, arts education anchors values, nurture our students' voices, and imbue in students a sense of identity and rootedness.

We look forward to hosting you and learning with you.

*Invitations to AEC 2018 will be sent in August to School Leaders, to nominate up to two music teachers.

We'd Love To Hear From You...



Lee Huan Siak James LEE_Huan_Siak@moe.gov.sg
Deputy Director (Music) +65 6664 1493

Li Yen See Chan_Yen_See@moe.gov.sg
Master Teacher (Music) +65 6664 1499

Suriati Bte Suradi Suriati_SURADI@moe.gov.sg
Master Teacher (Music) +65 6664 1498

Tan-Chua Siew Ling CHUA_Siew_Ling@moe.gov.sg
Master Teacher (Music) +65 6664 1501

Chan Yu Ling Josephine Josephine_CHAN@moe.gov.sg
Senior Academy Officer (Music) +65 6664 1555

Leong Siew Chun LEONG_Siew_Chun@moe.gov.sg
Senior Academy Officer (Music) +65 6664 1495

Tan Li Jen Adeline Adeline_TAN@moe.gov.sg
Senior Academy Officer (Music) +65 6664 1494

Kelly Tang Kelly_TANG@moe.gov.sg
Senior Academy Officer (Music) +65 6664 1561

Eng Yan Chen Alvyn Alvyn_ENG@moe.gov.sg
Academy Officer (Music) +65 6664 1497