

Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts



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The Reflective Music Educator



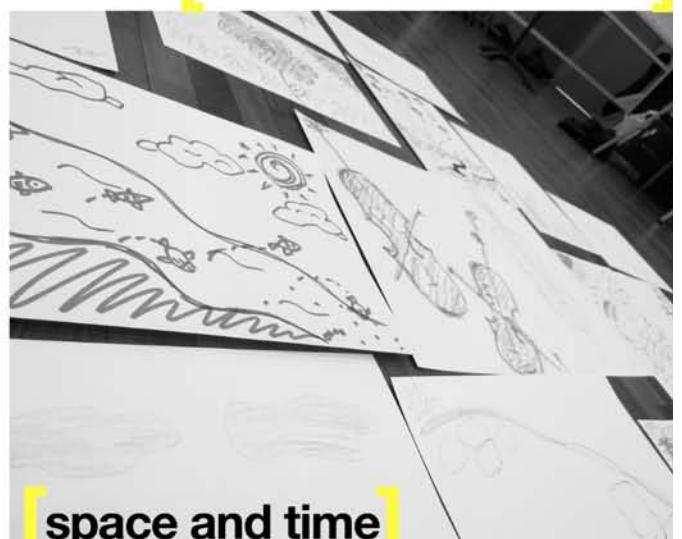
[thinking routines]



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STAR Singapore

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STAR - POST / MUSIC



**BEING A THE VALUE OF
REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER**

why:

Have you ever given thought to how you will greet your students at the start of your music lesson?

Some music teachers play music as their students enter the Music Room, inviting them into the sound world of the music they would be encountering for the lesson; others lead their students into the Music Room singing greeting songs; yet some other teachers say a casual hello as their students enter the Music Room, moving them straight into music making activities. Whatever your plans were for the start of your lesson, chances are, you would naturally have reflected upon them after you've carried out your plans.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REFLECT?

Many of us would likely agree that reflection is important for us as music educators. What does it mean to be a reflective practitioner or to engage in reflective inquiry? There is no one fixed definition of what it means to be a reflective practitioner. As Jasper (2003) puts it across succinctly:

reflection is the way we learn from an experience in order to understand and develop practice.

WHY REFLECT?

Reflection encourages us to better understand our students, their learning needs and abilities. To be student-centric in our music teaching and learning means knowing our students as they are. How they respond to our lessons provide rich fodder for reflection.

As we practise reflection, we are able to nurture reflective learners in our students. Our students see us as role-models from whom they learn how to reflect, analyse, evaluate and improve their own musical understanding. These are critical in developing self-directed learners.

Competing demands on our time means that it is not always easy to find time for reflection. In this issue of STAR-Post, we are pleased to share an exciting palette of strategies and ideas to fit reflection into our daily practice as busy music teachers.

Being a reflective practitioner could mean a different practice to each of us, or different expressions at different stages of our teaching career. Indeed, what is most critical is that one *does* engage in reflection and consider how one does it in the specific contexts that we encounter at different points in our music teaching.

American philosopher John Dewey discussed, in *How We Think* (1910), three attitudes he believed to be critical in reflective inquiry – that of being **open-minded**, **whole-hearted**, and **responsible**. These attitudes, of being accepting of various views, demonstrating commitment, and taking responsibility for our actions as a result of what we have gained insights into, are dispositions that could be lived out in our music teaching.

EMBARKING ON
a journey

- OF -

reflective
inquiry

how:

reflection ideas

Here are some Reflection Ideas we could try.

time

Make time, no matter how busy we are.

journaling

Keep a journal to record our thoughts.

lesson observations

Participate in lesson observations and record them.

teaching portfolio

Curate your personal teaching portfolio.

thinking routines

Incorporate thinking routines.

collaborative communities

Set up collaborative communities with like-minded colleagues.

research

Engage in a small-scale research project.

read

Reading provides multifarious possibilities for reflection.

conversations

Engage in conversations.

environment

Find a conducive environment.

mentoring

Mentor others or be mentored.



make time

"Piet Hein, a Danish writer and a 'philosopher of little things', coined the phrase 'Things Take Time'. My own variant is: 'Thinking Takes Time'. It takes time to create new thoughts, develop them (I call it 'Thought Care') and then get rid of them when they're out of date. Even little thoughts take a finite amount of time. Dismantling systems of thought and then rebuilding or replacing them demands thinking of the most time-consuming kind. Thought leads to social systems, and nothing dictates the future as ruthlessly as an established thought infrastructure. The most effective way of changing the future is to create a new system of thought."

Jonsson, 2003, p. 70



reflect:

An important step to a journey as a reflective practitioner is to make time to reflect! While a long stretch of an hour might seem impossible, it is useful and feasible to set aside ten minutes, at the same time, every day, for reflection.



Workshop participants deep in thought, penning their reflections in their journals.

How many of us kept a diary as a child? When we read our diary years down the road, what insights do we glean about our younger selves?

Keeping a journal to record our daily thoughts about teaching does not merely allow us to celebrate our successes and express our emotions about lessons that have gone less well than expected. Thoughts placed on paper also provide critical points for our reflection as educators – past, present and future.

Reading our journal entries about one particular class of students, for example, might give us knowledge over a period of time about the profile of the students and the pedagogical approaches that best help them learn. Periodic review of our journal entries might allow us to recognise certain patterns in our pedagogical practice and our students' response. Recording our aspirations at the start of the year might serve as a joyful reminder of what we have achieved when we review our entry at the end of the academic year.



journal

: photos
: drawings
: students' works

In STAR's *Teaching Living Legends* milestone programme, workshop participants are encouraged to complete a personal reflection at the end of each day. More than helping them record their learning, it provides time and space for the participants to reflect on the insights they have gained about their teaching practices and personal identity as a 21st Century Singapore music educator.



reflect :

What insights might you be able to glean if you were to keep a teaching journal? Consider going beyond a written journal, to include photos, drawings, and excerpts of your students' work as a result of your teacher facilitation. Or use an e-journal app on your mobile devices, so that you could add an entry whenever and wherever a point of reflection strikes you! Enjoy the reflection journey that journaling provides and get to know yourself better as a music educator.

classroom observations+recordings



Participants in discussion with pedagogue Jack Stevenson after observing his lesson demonstrating Dalcroze eurhythmics in a secondary school.

Farrell (2004) suggests that classroom observation need not be done by others, but could be conducted by and of oneself, by doing a video recording or audio recording of one's lesson. Viewing or listening to a recording of our own lesson, we might gain insights into how our tone of voice, our use of certain terms and phrases or our body language might be facilitating or hindering our students' learning. Viewing a video recording and making observations of our students'

reactions to our teaching is akin to putting a mirror on ourselves, giving us precious information on whether our curricular and pedagogical preparations really went according to plan. More importantly, this reflection-on-action gives us a way forward in planning for future lessons, constantly improving in our teaching practice towards better student learning.

observe : individual reflection : reflective conversations

Engaging the help of a critical friend to observe our lessons and provide us feedback adds further perspectives to our teaching practice. Besides the observations and suggestions that our critical friend could give us through notes taken during the lesson, the more important are the dialogues that take place before and after the lesson, which have the potential to contribute learning for both parties involved.

For Beginning Teachers (BTs), observing Senior Teachers (STs) and other experienced teachers could also be a rich learning experience. For the STAR BTs programme, BTs go into the classrooms of STs and other experienced teachers. In these authentic learning environments, they learn from observation, individual reflection, and reflective conversations with fellow music educators.



reflect :

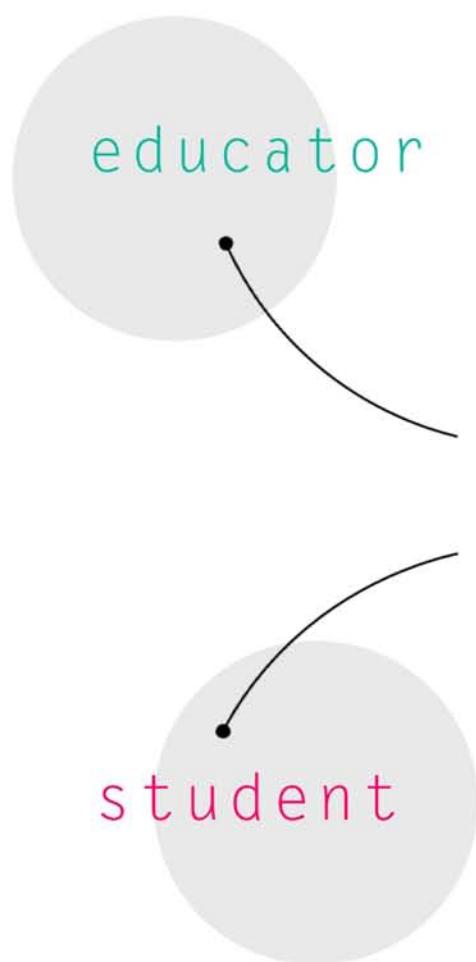
Quick tips for reflecting through music lesson observations:

- Make a short video recording of your lesson
- View it first without any sound to observe your gestures, facial expression and body language, before viewing it with audio and adding further observations
- Observe how you asked questions, and how your students responded to those questions. Was wait time given for students to respond too?
- Offer to open up your classroom to a colleague
- Request to sit in at your colleague's lesson

teaching portfolio

assessment that have powerful potential to facilitate students' learning and understanding of themselves.

As music educators, we can glean the same benefits as we maintain a teaching portfolio. If we are considering to go on the teaching track, we would also need to build our professional portfolio early.



P O R T F O L I O

Some educators are familiar with the use of student portfolios to help learners gain metacognition of their learning process. Portfolios also offer opportunities in self-assessment and formative

Unlike a journal, which could be very personal, a portfolio is more likely to contain professional documents and materials. We could design our own teaching portfolio to contain any number and types of artefacts that would give us information about our teaching practice and our growth over time. Whether they be curricular plans, lesson outlines, lesson materials we had designed, video recordings of our lessons, samples of students' works, feedback from our colleagues, records of learning at workshops attended, reflection forms or any other artefacts we deem relevant, these collated and sequenced artefacts could tell us much about ourselves.

portfolio

- Curricular plans
- Lesson outlines
- Lesson materials
- Video recordings of lessons
- Peer feedback
- Reflection forms

So that it doesn't become a mere collection of items, we should set time aside periodically to review our artefacts based on a particular theme for reflection. For example, we could look at our lesson plans and students' works across different terms. Ask ourselves critical questions about whether our lesson design achieved the intended student learning objectives. Recall the assumptions we held about our students in our lesson design and whether these assumptions held true. Think deeply about how we would approach lesson design for future lessons, so as to better lead our students towards the intended learning outcomes.

We could even go one step further to reflect on our learning needs as evidenced from our portfolio. With the increased self-awareness, we could approach our Reporting Officer to discuss our future professional learning needs. This active role we take will help us participate in different professional development programmes that are relevant at different stages of our career.

:periodic
question review
assumptions:
:metacognition

thinking routines



We can focus and deepen our reflection through the use of thinking routines. With regular practice, ten minutes of reflection facilitated with a thinking routine could sharpen our understanding of our chosen thread of reflective inquiry.

For example, we could practise the visible thinking routine “Step Inside” as we reflect on different goings-on in school. As we are preparing for the following week’s lessons, put ourselves in the shoes of our students and imagine how they would see it. What might their beliefs be, and what might they care about or question, that would influence their learning?

Participants’ responses to Visible Thinking Routine “CSI: Color, Symbol, Image” at STAR’s *Teaching Living Legends* milestone programme.

useful resources

Ritchhart, R., Church, M. & Morrison, K. (2011) *Making Thinking Visible*. USA: Jossey-Bass.

Visible Thinking Resource Book.
Retrieved 27 February, 2015, from http://admin.kasa.org/Professional_Development/documents/ThinkingClassroomResourceGuide.pdf

collaborative communities



STAR Champions coming together to develop understanding of Assessment for Learning (AfL) practices in the music classroom.

Meet regularly with a group of like-minded colleagues for structured dialogue on a chosen topic relating to music teaching.

Both online communities and face-to-face professional learning communities are helpful to connect with like-minded colleagues.

Join us at our STAR programmes to share and learn more.

useful resources

Burnard, P. & Hennesy, S. (Eds.) (2006) *Reflective Practices in Arts Education*. The Netherlands: Springer.

Dana, N. F. & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2008) *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Professional Development: Coaching Inquiry-Oriented Learning Communities*. USA: Corwin Press.

research

Some of us might think of educational research as being an activity which only academics engage in. Indeed, the large scale research studies that academics conduct can provide valuable data to inform our practice in the classroom.

However, “Research and practice are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are necessary for a teacher’s continued professional growth, and research can ensure the efficacy of practice decisions. ... large-scale research projects are often prohibitive to the classroom teacher because they may require sophisticated, oftentimes elaborate designs for data collection and analysis. But action research... is a mind-set as much as it is a method. It is a way of approaching teaching with a desire to be accountable for professional practice and motivated by the desire to improve such service. Action research provides teachers with a method for viewing their professional decisions systematically and deciding on them rationally.”

Parsons, R. D. & Brown, K. S.,
2002, p. 5-6



STAR teacher-researchers learning about music pedagogical research from research consultant Dr Lum Chee Hoo.

“
research and
practice are not
mutually exclusive

research

If you have always wanted to engage in research as a form of reflective practice to investigate and improve your teaching practice but don't know where to start, a wealth of reading materials are available at the Academy of Singapore Teachers library - Read@Academy, providing you starting points to your inquiry. If you require more specific support for your music pedagogical research, funding as well as research consultancy and training in music education research are also available through STAR's Arts Pedagogical Research Fund (APRF), a collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) under the Arts and Culture Strategic Review (ACSR).

To find out more about the APRF and the research projects Singapore music educators have conducted, do view STAR's Research Compendium 2013 and Research Compendium 2014 on our STAR website at <http://www.star.moe.edu.sg/resources/star-research-repository/>

: reflective
practice



reflect :

A good starting point to any action research usually comes from the genuine questions that you may already have of your daily lessons. For example, how would different scaffolding processes impact their effectiveness in delivering the same music concepts?



Reading provides multifarious possibilities for reflection. Books such as *A Teacher's Reflection Book*, *Examining and Facilitating Reflection to Improve Professional Practice* and *Reflective Practice in Action* provide many springboards for reflection. Don't limit your inspiration sources to non-fiction relating to education. Stories such as *The Little Prince* or even comic strips such as the *Peanuts* comic strips by Charles Schulz (<http://www.peanuts.com>) could provide meaningful contemplations for our practice as music educators.

conversations &

Get together with a few friends and simply chat.

At times, conversations with others can spark off reflective moments that inform our teaching practice.

environment

Pull up a couple of cushions and set yourself comfortably in an armchair. Throw in a cup of tea and your environment is all set to facilitate your reflection!

useful resources

Huling, L. & Virginia, R. (2001) *Teacher Mentoring as Professional Development*. ERIC Digest. Retrieved February 27, 2015, from <http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-3/mentoring.htm>

mentoring

In mentoring others, we grow too. At the same time that a mentor guides a mentee's learning and reflection, the mentor is inadvertently reflecting and learning too.

At STAR's *Engaging with Songs* professional development programme, mentoring and coaching are a combination of sessions at the academy, classroom observation and conversations facilitated by our Music Master Teachers, and teachers' reflection on an e-blog set up for this community of learners.

educating &
empowering

One teacher took time to reflect after participating in a workshop at the 10th World Symposium on Choral Music, and shared the following on the collaborative e-blog:

"The first thing I learnt today would be the importance of educating and empowering teachers. [It] reminded me of the need to constantly look out for new ideas and pedagogies. Not only is it important to educate self, it is equally important to educate / share ideas with the teachers around me. However, a concern I have would be that even with these sharing, teachers may not be comfortable carrying out these lessons. Thus, I believe that it is equally important to constantly empower and impact these teachers to try out new methods."

BEING A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF OUR CAREER

when:

“Reflecting can provide an ongoing process in which teachers remain learners, learning from their rich experience with students, with the academy, and with their scholarship.

In this cycle of teaching and learning, teachers renew their perspectives, redeem mistakes, and continue to develop and mature, no matter how experienced or expert they may be. Reflecting invites us to approach our subject with a beginner’s mind, which often leads us to fresh perspectives and renewed energy. Reflecting often restores a fresh dimension to a life that, without time to ponder and catch up, can become flat, routine, drudgery, even to those who love it most.”

Peters and Weisberg, 2011, p. 26

[renew perspectives]
[develop & mature]
[renewed energy]



As a Beginning Teacher,

your moments of reflection could revolve around your developing understanding of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Observing other teachers and conversations with them could provide much learning. Making time to reflect using a thinking routine might help you consolidate your learning after attending a workshop to hone your understanding of a music pedagogy. Participating in a collaborative community with fellow Beginning Teachers could provide much needed support and learning for all going through similar experiences in the classroom. Starting to build your teaching portfolio would be an investment of time that pays off richly now and into the future.

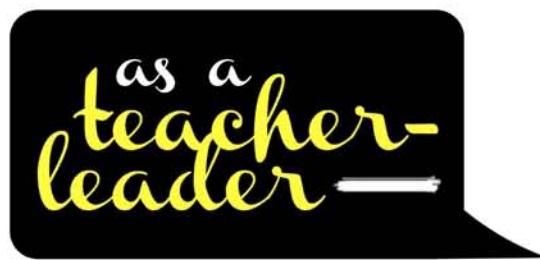
Visit the STAR website for more information on:
[Beginning Teacher \(Music\) Support Programme](#)



As an Experienced Teacher, your teaching journal kept over the years could provide a treasure of information to provide deep reflection on your classroom practice. The topic of investigation for a collaborative community you are involved in would likely differ from that when you were a Beginning Teacher. Peer classroom observation could provide meaningful reflection for all involved, and if accompanied by lesson videos, provide scope for continued reflective inquiry. You might also begin to be excited by the possibilities that action research offer for further strengthening of your classroom practice.

Visit the STAR website for more information on:

- [Kodaly, Orff and Dalcroze milestone programmes](#)
- [Teaching Living Legends](#)
- [Engaging with Songs](#)



As you grow into a Teacher-Leader,

you might have already transited into the role of being a mentor. You are likely to be engaged in different forms of reflective practice on a daily basis, concurrently guiding other educators in your cluster in their reflection. More than a record of your achievements and growth, your teaching portfolio that you might be preparing to submit for appointment to be a Senior Teacher, Lead Teacher or Master Teacher, could be a reflective tool that allows you to constantly better understand your own professional practice.

Visit the STAR website for more information on:

- [Senior Teacher \(Music\) Programme](#)
- [STAR Champions](#)
- [STAR Associates](#)

reflect:

Treat yourself to a reflective pause now and think about where you are in your teaching career. What are the reflection ideas that speak most to you and you would like to explore for your growth?

readings

The following books can be found at [Read@Academy](#).

Burnard, P. & Hennesy, S. (Eds.) (2006) *Reflective Practices in Arts Education*. The Netherlands: Springer.

Campbell, M. R., Thompson, L. K., & Barrett, J. R. (2010) *Constructing a Personal Orientation to Music Teaching*. New York: Routledge.

Dana, N. F. & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2008) *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Professional Development: Coaching Inquiry-Oriented Learning Communities*. USA: Corwin Press.

Dana, N. F. & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2009) *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Classroom Research: Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn through Practitioner Inquiry*. USA: Corwin Press.

Dewey, J. (1910) *How We Think*. U.S.A.: D. C. Heath & Co.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2004) *Reflective Practice in Action: 80 Reflection Breaks for Busy Teachers*. California: Corwin Press.

Harris, A. S., Bruster, B., Peterson, B. & Shutt, T. (2010) *Examining and Facilitating Reflection to Improve Professional Practice*. USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

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Lassonde, C. A. & Israel, S. E. (2010) *Teacher Collaboration for Professional Learning: Facilitating Study, Research, and Inquiry Communities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

readings

Loughran, J. (2010) *What Expert Teachers Do*. Oxford: Routledge.

Lyons, N. (Ed.) (2010) *Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Inquiry: Mapping a Way of Knowing for Professional Reflective Inquiry*. New York: Springer.

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Peters, J. K. & Weisberg, M. (2011) *A Teacher's Reflection Book: Exercises, Stories, Invitations*. USA: Carolina Academic Press.

Ritchhart, R., Church, M. & Morrison, K. (2011) *Making Thinking Visible*. USA: Jossey-Bass.

Saint-Exupéry, A. D. (1945) *The Little Prince*. Great Britain: Mammoth.

Schon, D. A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.

Simpson, D. J., Jackson, M. J. B. & Aycock, J. C. (2005) *John Dewey and the Art of Teaching: Toward Reflective and Imaginative Practice*. USA: Sage Publications.

Visible Thinking Resource Book. Retrieved 27 February, 2015, from
[http://admin.kasa.org/Professional_Development/documents/
ThinkingClassroomResourceGuide.pdf](http://admin.kasa.org/Professional_Development/documents/ThinkingClassroomResourceGuide.pdf)

<http://www.peanuts.com/>