



# Inquiry Through Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration for and as  
Professional Learning

Engaging with Songs –  
Collaboration in Action

Building a  
Collaborative  
Spirit

Developing an  
Authentic Collaborative  
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Primary School

Fostering  
Effective Teacher  
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**Fostering Effective Teacher Collaboration**



# Collaboration *for and as* Professional Learning

Collaboration is a powerful means for professional learning. Research has shown that for quality professional development to impact teaching practices, in addition to being anchored in teachers' reality and sustained over time, teachers also need to create peer collaboration (Chan & Pang, 2006; Richardson, 2003, cited in Musanti and Pence, 2010).

Collaborative practices are vibrant in our professional development landscape: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Communities of Practices (CoPs) and Networked Learning Communities (NLCs) are some of the various forms of collaborative communities we are familiar with.

While they may vary in form, what underpins them is the centrality of collaboration as professional learning; that professional knowledge creation, generation and sharing is key. Thus, as Jackson and Temperley (2007) put it, a great benefit of collaboration is “working smarter together, rather than harder alone.”

Indeed, collaboration has been identified as one of the key skills for 21<sup>st</sup> century success in life and career and is highlighted as one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies in our MOE 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies Framework.

## **MOE 21CC Framework**

<https://www.moe.gov.sg/education/education-system/21st-century-competencies>

## **PAM Research Report: Enhancing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies in Physical Education, Art and Music**

<http://library.opal.moe.edu.sg/cos/o.x?c=/library/reslib&uid=&ptid=84&func=prop2&id=263920>

At STAR, we recognise the rich experiences music teachers bring with them on their professional learning journeys, by virtue of being in their different school contexts and working with varied profiles of students. Providing opportunities to build networks of relationships through which teachers reflectively revisit teaching beliefs and generate new knowledge, building on one another’s experiences offer exciting ways to improve music teaching practice and contribute towards building up the professional capital of the fraternity (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2013).

In this issue of STAR-Post, we shine a spotlight on *Engaging with Songs* (EWS) programme which seeks to harness the collective advantage of collaboration, to strengthen professional conversations and relationships to impact professional learning.



# Engaging with Songs – Collaboration in Action

EWS reaches out to all primary school music teachers as part of their professional development to deepen their pedagogical understanding in teaching songs and leading singing in the classroom. This dynamic coursework entails **active musicking, collaborative discussions, reflection** and **dialogue** by teachers on how singing is a powerful means and experience to engage students creatively, and engender cross-cultural understanding and global awareness.

Singing is accessible to and can be enjoyed by every child. As a child's first musical instrument, singing is a concrete way to develop his self-awareness, relationship management, understanding of emotions and other aspects of social-emotional learning. EWS builds the capacities and leadership of confident music teachers who can engender the environment where students enjoy learning through singing.

Through the whole-school approach and professional learning activities that bring together teachers from different schools, EWS not only fosters a supportive professional culture that prioritises students' learning and sharing of best practices *within* a school, it also promotes a close-knit community comprising music teachers from *across* schools. Designed with PD time to facilitate deep conversations and sharing of thoughtful reflections, EWS is an ideal platform to build trust, collaboration and reflective practice as teachers embark on a journey of inquiry to deepen their instructional understanding of classroom singing.



*Collaboration and inquiry – establishing a common understanding through the process of inquiry*

## Education – Collaboration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Po40I4c94R0>

“  
notions  
+  
beliefs  
+  
theories  
=  
one concrete  
explanation  
and/or solution  
”

## Why Collaborative Inquiry?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUEiiUuKCKk>

“ Why collaborative inquiry?  
What’s in it for you?  
What’s in it for your students? ”

Singing builds community. Working in teams, the critical inquiry process strengthens not only the resolve to better our own teaching practice, but also transforms thinking and mental models held with assumptions regarding teaching and learning about singing within the classroom. To further support and develop teacher competencies through collaboration and inquiry, the EWS programme comprises a suite of workshops by master pedagogues, Music Master Teachers, learning journeys and lesson demonstrations to equip teachers with pedagogical skills to transform their music classroom into a joyful learning experience through singing.



*Teachers experiencing carefully-selected song repertoire*

A suitable song repertoire, selected with an understanding of educational psychology perspective, deepens students' learning. The EWS Teaching Resource Kit contains pedagogical resources for more than 300 songs and supports teachers' selection of appropriate curriculum materials for music teaching and learning. Songs are often stories told through music. Having an understanding of the broader socio-cultural contexts behind songs, told in the form of stories and narratives from the composer's lived experiences, provides for deeper emotional connections with the songs. EWS teachers deepen their understanding of the contextual stories through the narrative inquiry process, collectively growing their confidence to build students' meaning-making.



EWS Teaching Resource Kit

In the process of working and conversing together, the teachers pose and solve problems in delivering artful classroom singing activities. They make new discoveries through exploration of alternative approaches, constantly sharing, evaluating, adapting new teaching methods and reflecting. They gain deeper understanding of **what** they do, **how** they do and **why** they do; broadening their pedagogical perspectives for their music classrooms.



Forms of collaboration that take place within the EWS programme include:

### **STAR & Music Teachers**

- + *Develop pedagogical understanding for growing a culture of singing in the music classroom through pedagogical workshops*

### **STAR & Outstanding-Educator-in-Residence (OEIR)**

- + *Fortify professional training through masterclasses and lesson demonstrations by OEIR Kate Woolveridge from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama*

### **Master Teachers & Music Teachers**

- + *Develop teacher confidence through mentoring and co-teaching*

### **Within Schools - Teacher-Leaders & Peers**

- + *Exercise pedagogical leadership by guiding peers in the planning and delivery of quality music lessons*

### **Between Schools**

- + *Engage in collaborative discussions, reflection and dialogue*

## **What Makes Teacher Collaboration Work?**

<http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/what-makes-teacher-collaboration-work>

## **Teaching Together for Change**

[http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/02/teaching-together-change?utm\\_source=Usable](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/02/teaching-together-change?utm_source=Usable)

## EWS PD with Master Teachers and Outstanding-Educator-in-Residence



*Learning to teach songs through games, under the guidance of our Music Master Teachers*



*Supporting one another in trying teaching strategies, and having fun at the same time*



*Collaborative conversations to broaden perspectives and grow new ideas*



*Teachers learning eagerly from OEIR Kate Woolveridge in masterclasses and open lesson demonstrations, followed by unpacking of pedagogical approaches facilitated by Music Master Teachers*

# Building a Collaborative Spirit



EWS programme piloted in July 2014 with selected schools interested to develop their teachers' capacity to engage pupils singing in their Primary 1 & 2 music classes. Today, teachers are supported in their learning to implement singing in their curriculum and as a powerful means towards enhancing socio-emotional competencies. The sensemaking became purposeful when teachers believed in the possibility of singing to engender a sense of community and learner-centred growth.

The programme brought about, to date, the collaboration of 38 primary schools and a total of 108 teachers.

The professional development opportunities empower EWS teachers to see themselves as agents of change. They co-construct possibilities for implementation of the revised music syllabus, and jointly design lessons to develop students in the 21st century competencies. The journey witnessed transformative learning in our teachers, with their pedagogical practices informed by new perspectives towards teaching singing to engender cross-cultural understanding and global awareness.

Working with others and dialogue with peers can build clarity and strengthen resolve. Teachers build confidence to conduct engaging music lessons for their students. The collaboration with colleagues within and across schools also strengthens their commitment to engage meaningfully in school improvement.



“ I used to wonder how to get students to sing loudly and with feelings, how to get students to enjoy singing, how to ‘open’ their mouths and get lovely songs out of them. Now, I still wonder. But I am going to be the one to lead them in singing. I want to be their role model. Not just to the students but also to the music teachers.

I want to be able to spread the love for a singing culture to all students and staff in my school, start a Singing CoP (Community of Practice) in my cluster, and collaborate with other EWS teachers to organise meaningful singing programmes. All these take time and I have to start somewhere. I will take baby steps towards my dream. ”

**- APRIL CHUA  
FUHUA PRIMARY SCHOOL**



*2014 EWS teacher-leaders attending the 10th World Symposium on Choral Music in Korea*

The EWS programme is also designed to encourage collaboration amongst teacher-leaders. Teacher-leaders from the EWS schools receive additional professional development opportunities. Significantly, they are supported in their professional learning by their school leaders to participate in overseas study trips, attend conferences and festivals to further broaden their perspectives and extend their pedagogical considerations for singing.

During these study trips, STAR facilitates reflective conversations, using thinking routines to engender teacher-leaders' reflection on the role they play in building a singing culture. These collective conversations in turn encourage teacher-leaders to view their teaching practice as a fraternity through different lenses, transforming teacher beliefs and empowering their pedagogical leadership.

The beauty of such transforming beliefs inspire teacher-leaders to share their learning with other music educators in their clusters, spreading understanding of pedagogy beyond EWS programme schools. In these new collaboration platforms initiated by EWS teacher-leaders, they benefit others as much as they do themselves, deepening their own inquiry and understanding in the process.

“ As a spin-off from this learning trip, I am inspired to share with my school colleagues my dream of building a singing culture and a unique identity through singing in Chongzheng. These are my plans to realise my dream:

- Share with EXCO my trip experience
- Share with my music teachers and get their ideas on how we can develop a singing culture in our school
- Collaborate with my teachers to relook what we have at Chongzheng and explore how these programmes can be reviewed to lend support to building a singing culture

I am also inspired to share with my cluster and work collaboratively on the possibility of having a day of singing and fun together. During that ‘Day of Singing’, we could have our school choirs to have an exchange and also a segment for each school to send one class of pupils to have a few hours of fun with singing games and mass singing. ”

**- BRIDGETTE TEH  
CHONGZHENG PRIMARY SCHOOL**



*2015 EWS teacher-leaders attending Coralua Trondheim International Choir Festival in Norway*



Teacher-leaders also collaborate to plan and organise EWS Day. EWS Day on 14 Sep 2014 and 12 Oct 2015 saw teachers and students from the EWS schools come together in the School of the Arts (SOTA) Concert Hall, celebrating through singing games and common songs.

The experience of singing with hundreds of other children in a concert hall was richly-rewarding for the students involved. For the teachers, it gave them room to work in partnership to apply their learning from the EWS programme, at the same time giving consideration to the diverse music learning needs of students from the various schools.

Teacher beliefs were transformed when teacher confidence increased because of the collaborative spirit of teachers supporting one another to develop an aesthetic music learning experience for students. The confidence gained strengthens their identity as music teachers and transforms their pedagogical practice in the music classroom. STAR presented some of these findings at the recent Singing Symposium, a conference for pedagogues and researchers in St John's Labrador, Canada and received good response and feedback for the work in progress.





**EWS Day 2014 Video**



**EWS Programme Video**





# Developing an Authentic Collaborative Community in Pei Tong Primary School



Inspired by the learnings from EWS, Pei Tong Primary embarked on the re-designing of their music programme with renewed vigour. Their collaborative journey resulted in the development of Pei Tong's Learning for Life Programme (LLP), which seeks to develop a school-wide singing culture, focusing on students' enjoyment of music.

In the course of their review, the team reflected on their teaching practices and beliefs, reviewed the music curriculum design and crafted lesson plans underpinned by singing pedagogy and trialled innovative lesson ideas to enhance students' learning.

Anchored by the aim to provide a positive and meaningful music experience for all students, learning through songs and games forms an integral part of the music programme. The music teachers hope to inculcate in their students an enduring love for learning and enjoyment of music.

A highlight of the music programme is Pei Tong's annual week-long Arts Festival, which features performances by individuals, groups and class acts. Through the Arts Festival, all students enjoy an authentic arts experience as a performer or audience. This shared inquiry in engendering a 'singing school' was made possible through teacher collaborative efforts, demonstrating power in teams. Some key ingredients that made the inquiry journey a success include:

- A positive inquiry spirit; courage and capacity to tread on uncharted grounds to explore and trial lesson ideas to enhance students' learning experiences
- Support from school leaders; where mechanisms for collaboration are in place and provision of structural support for the implementation of school-wide programme
- Open communication between music teachers; through regular sharing and dialogue of ideas before deciding which is the best idea to implement with students' learning experience in mind

**Sharing by Pei Tong Primary Music Teachers:**  
**Mr Lim Zi Kai (Music Coordinator)**  
**Mr Ng Wen Liang James**  
**Mdm Yar King Looi (School Staff Developer)**



# Fostering Effective Teacher Collaboration

EWS would not have been a successful platform to foster productive and effective teacher collaboration if not for the strong **support from school leaders** as they drive transformation and innovation through their stewardship. Their support for teachers' training and subject deployment, complemented by purposeful professional development, helps propel the teachers in their quest to deepen their pedagogical understanding.

Another critical success factor is the **commitment** demonstrated by the teachers to **participate actively** in the journey of shared inquiry. Their willingness to take on and share responsibility, receptiveness to multiple perspectives in their on-going exchanges in collaborative discussions, reflection and dialogue have contributed immensely to the enhancement and enjoyment of learning and singing experiences for our students.

In this professional development journey, the music teachers have found for themselves a community of like-minded music educators, with whom they can find support and trusted critical friends for teaching ideas and approaches.

This transformative journey has provided our teachers with a renewed purpose and meaning. More confident, our teachers feel empowered in knowing what pedagogy to use for their classroom singing to provide effective learning experiences for their students. They now see themselves as catalysts of change to better classroom practices through co-construction of knowledge and reflection on the impact of their actions.

As Michael Fullan (1993) has aptly summarised in *Change Forces*, every teacher must be a change agent. Collaboration provides the catalyst that can propel exponential change, bringing benefits to innumerable teachers and students.

## **Team / Collaborative Teaching**

<https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teamcollaborative-teaching/>

“ ... successful collaborative teaching integrates the strengths of multiple viewpoints in a synthetic endeavour that no single member of the project could have completed. ”

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