

## **‘It’s fun, unthreatening and engaging’: Professional learning in initial teacher education, BEd Primary**

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Professional organisations in Australia are well placed to offer initial teacher education (ITE) students, in-service teachers, and tertiary educators the opportunity to engage in professional learning. This paper explores the importance of building collaborative relations with professional organisations to enhance ITE students’ music knowledge, skills and understandings. The study took place at Deakin University’s Metropolitan campus in Melbourne. It investigates why people come together to share music making practice, and explores participants experiences and engagement when undertaking professional learning. I draw on questionnaire data from participants and workshop presenters in 2018 and 2019 to inform the findings. Data were analysed using thematic analysis that is reported thematically under two headings, professional sharing and creative music making. The findings show that participation in the workshops offered participants the opportunity to create music soundscapes, build confidence, develop ideas for music teaching, and learn about the importance of professional learning. I argue for the need to work collaboratively with professional organisations when preparing ITE students for the profession. Further research is required in this area that supports professional learning in ITE programs.

### **Introduction**

This study is situated in Australia where all initial teacher education (ITE) programs are accredited through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). In my role as tertiary educator, building partnerships with professional organisations forms an essential part of preparing ITE students for future classrooms. Working collaboratively with professional organisations enhances student learning and improves their work experience opportunities (Deakin University, 2020). All ITE students are required to meet AITSL Standards by showing evidence of professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement as a graduate teacher (AITSL, 2021). Professional organisations are well placed to offer ITE students, in-service teachers and tertiary educators the opportunity to engage in workshops, seminars and conferences that may enhance their professional learning (Hord, 2004). Professional organisations often provide “opportunities for professional development at local, regional, and national meetings” (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998, p. 8). With the expansion of technology, professional organisations offer resources, “discussion groups, and other forms of information sharing” that may enrich teacher knowledge (Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). Engaging in professional learning with professional organisations fosters ways to improve practice (AITSL, 2021).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the debates and consensus around professional development (PD) and professional learning (PL). Rather it is argued that PL is “at the heart of teacher practice” (Victorian State Government, 2021). Teachers have to

“plan for their classes, deliver their lesson, monitor student engagement, measure the impact of their teaching, and adjust their practice to optimise student learning ... they become learners of their own teaching” (Victorian State Government, 2021). Similarly, PD is a way for teachers to expand their skills and knowledge. It contributes to improving student learning and can occur in formal and informal settings (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Guskey, 2002; Schwartz & Bryan, 1998). PD and PL are used interchangeably in this paper where the focus is on PL as collaboration (Harris & Jones, 2017; Loughland & Nguyen, 2020). PL/PD meets changes to educational reforms and improves teaching quality (Bicaj & Buza, 2020). Little has been written about the benefits of undertaking PL for music teachers (Pellegrino, 2011). Working in partnership with professional organisations as learning communities, provide opportunities for participants to share, learn, and build music knowledge as knowers and learners (Wood, 2007). Teachers draw on tacit knowledge to improve their practice (Benade, 2015; Schön, 1983).

My research focuses on working with a peak body for music education in Australia, the Australian Society for Music Education (ASME). As a provider of PL, ASME is committed to collaborative learning, collective learning, and the application of learning to improve practice (McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler & Lundeberg, 2013; Putnam & Borko, 1997). The organisation has been functioning since 1967. Their purpose is “to encourage and advance music education at all levels as an integral part of general education and community life, and as a profession within the broad field of music” (ASME, 2020). ASME’s Victorian Chapter (ASME VIC) regularly offers PL for teachers across the state of Victoria. Since March 2017, they have conducted student composition projects in schools. These workshops aim to create rich classroom resources in a collaborative space where school students can learn from each other. In 2018 and 2019, ASME VIC offered professional learning workshops to ITE students and teachers in Melbourne. This initiative serves as an effective way to support music educators and researchers (ASME VIC, 2020). While an emerging number of professional development studies of music educators have been undertaken with first year teachers and beyond (Bauer, 2007; Conway, 2003), few studies report on ITE students’ feedback about attending workshops by professional organisations.

Providing PL opportunities for ITE students is one way for them to gain quality support material when there is a gap of resources and insufficient time within ITE music programs. Working with PL organisations allows early career teachers to gain help and advice as many work in isolation as the sole music teacher in a school (Davidson & Dwyer, 2014). Schiemann (2016) argued that generalist music teachers need support to improve their pedagogical and content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). As non-specialists in music, they have less of an awareness regarding students’ musical learning problems. Therefore, attending PL experiences provides opportunities for ITE students and teachers to gain new insights about teaching, reflecting on the process and not the product (Schön, 1987). A study by Pellegrino (2011, p. 86), found that “professional development programs could be created to provide opportunities for teachers to better understand and refine the ways in which they integrate music-making and teaching”. PL programs for

music need to be relevant for classroom practice, offering extrinsic and intrinsic benefits through musical participation (McFerran & Crooke, 2014).

Research has shown that music education is allocated less time and resources within ITE programs (Baldwin & Beauchamp 2014; Munday & Smith 2010; Russell-Bowie 2009). Many universities do not offer sufficient hours in the Bachelor of Education (primary) (BEd Primary) program for music. Therefore, building partnerships with education providers “benefits our students, teachers, researchers and communities” (Deakin University, 2020). The opportunity for ITE students to gain further skills in music education in collaboration with ASME was opportune. By attending previous workshops facilitated for generalist and specialist music teachers by the organisation, I collaborated with ASME VIC to provide PL to ITE students at Deakin University. As with any collaboration, communication in the planning aspect is critical, working enthusiastically together to promote the event was a worthy initiative (Abeles, 2004; Colley et al., 2012; Holdhus & Espland, 2013). Working with experts in the field in a friendly and safe environment is an effective, efficient and essential way for ITE students to include music in their generalist classrooms (de Vries, 2013; King, 2018; Joseph, Nethsinghe & Cabedo-Mas, 2019). The aims of the workshops were intended to support ITE students professional practice, to build their confidence, and to expand their knowledge and understanding by integrating music into Victorian Curriculum. Engaging with ASME VIC meant ITE students had the opportunity to network and become part of a community of practitioners as many music teachers work in isolation (Burwell, Carey & Bennett, 2017; Wenger, 1998).

The workshops served as a learning experience for ITE students undertaking a core Arts Education unit (subject) in their first year of study within the BEd Primary program. The Arts Education unit time is shared across dance, drama, music and visual and media arts. Students gain two-hours of face-to-face teaching and one hour of online self-directed activities across three weeks; a short timeframe to prepare students with requisite knowledge, understanding and skills to include music in the primary classroom (de Vries, 2013). The purpose of the study working with ASME VIC was to build students music pedagogical and content knowledge (Schulman, 1986), and enhance their confidence to include music in the primary classroom (de Vries, 2013; Schiemann, 2016). Undertaking the study serves as an informative way to gain feedback about PL. Feedback improves the quality of teaching, and impacts on student learning (Hattie, 2009).

There were two guiding questions that drove the study (a) what are the experiences and engagement of participants when undertaking professional learning?; and (b) why people come together to share music making and practice? This research adds to the growing body of research on feedback and insights into views on receiving and providing professional learning.

I draw on questionnaire data from participants and workshop presenters in 2018 and 2019 to discuss two themes (professional sharing and creative music making). Data for 2020 could not be obtained, as the planned 2020 face-to-face workshop was cancelled because of lockdown restrictions in Melbourne due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **What does the literature say?**

Music is a core learning area in the Victorian curriculum (VCAA, 2020). Many generalist teachers integrate music into their primary classrooms, with some teaching music in the primary school (Pascoe et al., 2015). Within ITE programs, not all students specialise in music, yet many include music in primary classrooms. For this reason, it is important for ITE students to interact and engage with other teachers as part of their PL as they become adaptive experts (de Vries, 2013; Lieberman & Pointer Mace 2010; Schmidt & Robbins, 2011). Attending PL workshops opens up a space for ITE students to be part of a community of practitioners where learning is often constructed as a social activity (Wenger, 1998). Consequently the benefits of PD fosters a “sense of belonging, satisfaction, and flow experiences” (Pellegrino, 2011, p. 83). Pellegrino pointed out that PD provides participants with improved “self-confidence, self-efficacy, and a stronger sense of identity” (2011, p.83-84). Therefore, participating in group music making activities in higher education spaces has the capacity to build “a strong sense of social unity and [which] can foster uplifting, exhilarating, and motivating feelings” (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007, p. 99).

The study is situated in Victoria, therefore ITE students focus on the Victorian Curriculum as they prepare to teach in primary classrooms. The music curriculum is structured around four interdependent strands (explore and express, music practices, present and perform, and respond and interpret). Students learn as artist and as audience through making and responding (VCAA, 2020). The notion of composition is factored into the curriculum as a key area. Composition includes “using the voice, body, instruments, sound sources, and digital technologies” (VCAA, 2020). It also allows students the opportunity to “create music in different styles and forms, exploring personal interests and given ideas” (VCAA, 2020).

## **About the workshops**

The creative music workshops on composition were based on a social constructivist view of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Participants were able to engage “in a broad range of joint activities and internalize the effects of working together, [they] acquire[ing] new strategies and knowledge” (Palincsar, 1998, pp. 351-352). Teaching about composition and creativity involves divergent and convergent thinking. On the one hand, divergent thinking involves initially exploring different thoughts, ideas and making connections in an unstructured manner. On the other hand, convergent thinking includes “refining and shaping them [ideas] into a final product” (Thorpe, 2017, p. 306). While the ASME presenters took the lead and shared their resources, participants had to take responsibility for their own learning (Gruenhagen, 2008). The “impetus and energy” comes from participants, they have “control over their own learning” (Stanley, 2011, p. 75). Nevertheless, the exchange between participants at the workshops were an essential element in the construction of new ideas.

The May 2018 and July 2019 workshops were advertised through *Eventbrite* and were administered by ASME VIC. In addition, students in their first year were informed about the workshop by the course director and me as tertiary music educator via posting a notice on the unit cloud site. On both occasions, the workshop took place at the university on a Saturday morning between 10am and 12noon. ITE students self-selected to attend the workshop, attendance was not compulsory. Students were charged a nominal fee of AUD\$5 by ASME. At the end of the workshop they received a PD certificate.

Working with professional organisations are essential for students as they prepare for the profession; in doing so, they meet AITSL standards as they engage in professional learning (AITSL, 2021). I briefed the organiser regarding what students had covered in the six-hours of face-to-face time (an introduction to the Victorian music curriculum, teaching the elements of music, songs, and about creative music processes regarding soundscapes and graphic notation). The aims of the workshops were to present strategies that could be used in the classroom to build compositional skills, by using a storybook to create a soundscape. This strategy enables students to experience the story while creating a new 'sound world' to the story. The idea of creating new sound worlds is mentioned repeatedly in the Victorian Music Curriculum (VCAA, 2020).

The 2018 workshop was led by Michael Travers and Dr Ros McMillan (committee members for ASME VIC). The focus of the workshop drew on an authentic storybook by Mark Wilson, entitled *Migaloo, The White Whale*. This true story is about a rare white whale that travels each year from the Antarctic to the Queensland coast (The White Whale Research Centre, n.d.). Michael read the story while participants explored the space using their creative abilities and imagination to decode the pictures/storyline by using conventional instruments (such as boom whackers, drums, xylophones, metallophones, keyboard and voice) and non-conventional instruments (such as water bottles, whirly tubes, scrunching paper). As an experienced composer and former tertiary educator (Melbourne University), Ros introduced participants to graphic notation, teaching them about compositional ideas in a short space of time. Participants worked in six groups representing the story book. Paper, writing material and non-conventional sounds were provided by ASME VIC. Participants were asked to compose a soundscape using graphic notation using conventional music instruments and non-conventional sounds. All groups included movement when performing their soundscape to participants at the workshop.

In a similar fashion, the 2019 workshop was again led by Michael Travers, Dr Ros McMillan, and included Jen Skate. Both Jen and Michael were experienced music specialist at schools. Michael started off the session using 'tennis balls' as a warmup activity. This was followed by Ros reading the story book of *Ernie dances to the didgeridoo* by Alison Lester (Lester, 2001). She engaged participants in a lively discussion about various words and sounds that related to the six seasons in the book (*Monsoon, Harvest, Fall, Early Dry, Hot Dry and Pre-Monsoon*). Jen concluded the workshop by providing participants with many ideas, and strategies for classroom practice. This included working around a guiding question to focus participants attention on a key idea. Participants worked in six groups representing the six seasons in the story book. Each group posed a guiding question in relation to creating a soundscape for their chosen season. Participants gained ideas and

collaborated with each other using critical thinking skills to plan, prepare, and present their creative music compositions. They worked on drawing paper using writing material to compose. Group performances included sounds from conventional classroom instruments (such as piano, rain sticks, kokorikos, drums, xylophones, marimba, metallophones and tambourines) and body percussion (clicks, stamps, claps).

At both workshops, presenters took time to answer participant questions during and after the workshop time. Presenters also offered their contact details if participants wanted to ask further questions or needed help with incorporating music into their classroom practice. Presenters spoke of the importance and benefits of undertaking PL as early career teachers.

## **Methodology**

Ethical permission was sought and granted in 2018 by Deakin University to undertake the study. Initially contact was made through the secretary (ASME VIC) by telephone explaining the project and inviting the organisation to be part of the study. This was followed by emailing the 'Plain Language Statement and Consent' form which explained the project and included a sample questionnaire. Consent was granted from ASME VIC to participate in the research. This paper, employs a qualitative case study approach that is "bounded by time and activity" (Creswell, 2014, p. 43). Case study methodology is used to answer how and why questions and is exploratory in nature (Yin, 2014). It also investigates in a real-life context how individuals respond to their local environment (Ary et al., 2006; Merriam, 1998). A case study examines a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000). In this case study, ASME VIC provided PL workshops in 2018 and 2019 to ITE generalist Bachelor of Primary students and music teachers. A case study is descriptive in that it focuses on participants experience in their local context. Questionnaire data gathered in 2018 and 2019 was gathered with participants and presenters (Creswell, 1994; Geertz, 1983; Williams, 2007). As researcher, I did not teach any of the students participating in the 2018 or 2019 workshops.

## **Research collection**

At the end of the workshop, hard copies of the Plain Language Statement were handed out to participants explaining the project which also included the questionnaire. Hard copy distribution often ensures mass participation and "can be implemented at the right time; in this case, at the end of the training sessions when the participants still had a vivid memory of the experience" (Pozzo, Borgobello & Pierella, 2019, p. 6). The project was carefully explained and questions or concerns were responded to in-person. Participation was voluntary, completing the anonymous questionnaire meant participants gave their consent. This aspect was clearly outlined in the Plain Language Statement and on the questionnaire. The disadvantage of distributing the questionnaire was that some questions may not be answered, and an incomplete questionnaire could be submitted. Researchers generally have no control over this, nor over the order in which the questions were answered. In addition, they are not able to check on incomplete responses once the questionnaire is submitted (Jones, Murphy, Edwards & James, 2008). Participants had

three options to return the questionnaire. They could place it in a clearly marked box in the music teaching space on the day of the workshop, or send via the postal service, or place it in a clearly marked box left outside the music room for a period of up to one month.

### **Data tool**

Questionnaires are a quick and reliable way to collect data that provides accurate data on facts, attitudes and beliefs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Taherdoost, 2016). Questionnaires are a popular tool for acquiring information at a low cost where anonymity can be maintained (Bird, 2009; Jackson & Trochim, 2002). As an experienced researcher, the questions were developed by initially testing it with some students to check for any confusion or ambiguity (Taherdoost, 2016). I also used face validity with an expert in the field to review the questionnaire who also confirmed content validity (Bolarinwa, 2016). The reliability of the instrument in 2018 meant it could be replicated in 2019. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions included ticking a box regarding age, gender and occupation. Open-ended questions included: Why did you attend the workshop? What was challenging? What did you benefit or gain from the workshop as a teacher or future teacher? Why do you think composition and or music engagement is important in the curriculum and school setting? Open questions were added to understand the perceptions, behaviour and beliefs held by the participants. Open ended questions add richness to the survey results which is not possible to achieve with closed questions (Krosnick, 2018; Pozzo, Borgobello & Pierella, 2019).

### **Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed as an analytic tool to analyse the 2018 and 2019 data. Thematic analysis explores research questions about people's experiences as well as their understandings about a particular phenomenon (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Themes provide shape and enable description "in the context of the entire data set" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3358). All questionnaires were compiled and grouped according to each question (Oppenheim, 1992). Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis, the questionnaire data was read and re-read to gain familiarity with the answers. An inductive way of coding was employed, directed by the content of the data (Braun & Clarke 2014). The data was then coded into broad themes capturing recurring patterns across the dataset, before searching for common threads (Table 1). The themes tell the story of the data when writing up the narrative about the data.

### **Findings**

All students participating in the workshops were generalist primary undergraduate students without a special qualification in music. In 2018, 77 % of participants responded to the survey (14 from 18), and 90% in 2019 (27 from 30). Some primary generalist teachers (three in 2018, and six in 2019) attended the PL, including one music specialist. Some teachers attended the workshop because they saw the advertisement on the ASME VIC website. Whilst no statistical inferences are made in relation to age or gender, 50% of

Table 1: Questionnaire themes

Initial coding	Emergent themes	Overarching themes
Socialisation Support structures Administration of events	Social network	Professional sharing
Interpersonal relations Integrated teaching ideas Playing as a community	Collaborations	
Learning from others Storytelling Music activities	Leading the group	Creative music making
Instruments Notation Playing with others	Composing	

participants in 2018 and 2019 were female falling into the 18-26 age group. In the next section I discuss two overarching themes: professional sharing (from the perspectives of the presenters, ITE students and teachers), and creative music making (from the perspectives of presenters and all participants).

### Professional sharing

#### *Perspectives of presenters*

The presenters felt ASME as a professional music organisation could offer ITE students and teachers workshops on composition. One presenter said the PL workshop was a

... way to address the need for classroom compositional strategies to meet the requirements of the Victorian Curriculum ... children's books can be used as an impetus to compositional strategies, providing structure and inspiration.

Another presenter felt offering a support structure was important in that

... future classroom teachers should become familiar with the 'ins and outs' of taking part in a creative activity, so that students would feel comfortable when teaching their own students when they are qualified teachers.

One presenter felt while collaborations take time, "setting up the workshop and finding a space with available instruments makes a difference". This presenter made the point that a convenient location that works for attendees is important when setting up a PL workshop. In addition another presenter remarked, "finding an appropriate time, determining a fee structure that was accessible to students and framing content", were key factors in setting up the workshops. One presenter stressed that professional sharing had to be "applicable to pre-service teachers which depended on the availability of instruments and audio visual equipment required for the workshop". As the venue was offered at no cost to the organisation, one presenter said "we are grateful to have access to the lovely music room at the university".

*Perspectives of ITE students*

Participants attended the workshops for a range of reasons other than building a social network and making connections for support structure and resources. Some wanted “to gain ideas for placement”, “network with other students and teachers”, and “extend my [their] music knowledge”. The majority of participants remarked they wanted to “learn how to integrate music into the everyday classroom”, “develop ideas for teaching in future classrooms”, “learn simple compositional approaches” and “learn about new strategies and ideas as a generalist teacher”.

ITE students felt working with a professional organisation offered them the chance to “build professional knowledge” and “get a rich understanding of how music can be taught in an engaging way”. In addition, students found the opportunity for presenters to share their expertise was useful, as one remarked, it “extended my music knowledge and filled in gaps”. Another found:

... the workshop experience was very hands-on, which helped understand and develop teaching ideas as we were learning by ‘doing’. I have had no musical education before (only in year 7 which I only remember learning to draw a treble clef), therefore the basic and effective use of graphical notation to structure a lesson was very beneficial, and it is something I look forward to using in my classroom. I definitely felt more confident to actually attempt teaching music in my classroom, and will be able to expand my ideas of integrating music into literacy or numeracy.

Attending the workshops also allowed students to “network and make new friends”, one said, “it’s cheap and you don’t lose anything by attending”. Whereas another admitted she “gained a PD certificate [by attending], and it looks good on the CV”. A few students mentioned the workshop will help them in a composition assignment. This was summed up by one student saying she attended the workshop “to pick up information for an upcoming assignment”.

*Perspectives of teachers*

The workshop experience was summed up by a male teacher who felt “it a wonderful interactive way of bringing literature, drama and music into the classroom that children can immerse themselves in”. A female teacher said she learnt “how to connect the elements of music to movement as [I am] not music trained”. Another female teacher found “music brings a richness to the learning environment that can make learning enjoyable”, attending the workshop gave her ideas in which “many subjects can be integrated authentically through the music curriculum”. Another stated, “I always find these workshops both inspiring and educational, in a personal and professional sense”. A male teacher summed up the workshop by saying “experiencing music making through professional learning can be fun, unthreatening and engaging to all learners”.

**Creative music making***Perspectives of presenters*

The notion of composing was made easy, do-able and achievable by one of the presenters who taught about different ways one could graphically notate to tell the story through

sound without using music notation. One instructor said, “the aim of the workshop was to present strategies that could be used in the classroom to build compositional skills”. Another presenter felt it important to present in an “informal” way that made participants feel comfortable. This was similar to the other presenter wanting the workshop atmosphere to be “non-threatening”. In doing so participants felt empowered to be creative in ways that they notated the sounds using conventional instruments and non-conventional sounds. This presenter added in PL “one has to ensure that the outcome is one that reaches as high a standard as possible while also making sure the activity is highly enjoyable”. She said through creative music making, “composing helps students to gain different perspectives on the story, which in turn leads to multiple musical expressions and representations. The idea of “asking a guiding question” by one presenter helped participants focus on the sounds and instruments they could consider for their soundscape.

#### *Perspectives of participants*

Students found the hands-on creative music making process “can easily be done in classrooms”, “was great” and “we had such fun!” Clear instructions of what to do were given by the presenters using tennis balls, water bottles to blow bubbles, boom whackers, etc. One student said they felt “safe to engage with others”. In addition, they felt it was “okay to make mistakes and take chances to explore sounds”. Many felt what they experienced “could be used in a primary classroom”. The general feeling by the participants was summed up by one who said, “using graphic notation to structure sounds as a group was something we could achieve”.

Using Australian story books (*Migallo, the white whale* in 2018 and *Ernie dances to the didgeridoo* in 2019) offered participants useful ideas to teach across the curriculum. The idea of using a storybook to create a soundscape according to the students was “inspiring”, “motivational”, and “a great way to get children focused” in a primary classroom. They found using story books with children can help teach about the “environment”, “sustainability”, “language”, and “cultural connections”. For example, using a story book like *Migallo*, a student felt that it

... allows students to explore sounds and the end product ... usually something you never expect. I can say this as, I never thought about how a simple blow through a straw in water can make so many different sounds.

A teacher commented, “it is a wonderful interactive way of bringing literature, drama and music into the classroom that children can immerse themselves in”.

## **Discussion**

Building collaborative partnerships with ASME is a positive way to support ongoing PL for ITE students. Although planning takes time to collaborate with the professional organisation to set up the workshops, it was apparent from the feedback that the workshops served as an effective way for participants to meet presenters who are experienced music teachers and experts in the field. The PL workshop provided

presenters (committee members for ASME VIC) to talk about the organisation as a community of practitioners (Wenger, 1998). Social networking forms an important part of having a sense of belonging as many primary music teachers work in isolation as the only teacher at the school. Therefore, meeting presenters in-person and talking with them about their teaching experience encourages early career teachers to trial some of the activities learnt at the workshop, be mentored by them, and to stay in the profession. Participants learnt about the organisation first-hand and were offered support by the organisation. Part of my remit as a tertiary music educator is to provide ITE students with as many opportunities as possible for them to “function more resourcefully, flexibly, adaptively, and creatively” (Burnard & Haddon 2015, p. 6). Participants saw the value of including and integrating music into their future classrooms (Colley et al., 2012; Holdhus & Espeland, 2013). Working with professional music organisations is an excellent way for ITE students to think about their future practice as generalist teachers (AITSL, 2021). The workshop provided new planning ideas and teaching strategies (McConnell et al., 2013).

Participants gained many musical and creative opportunities within a short space of time (Burnard & Murphy, 2017). ITE students particularly expressed the need to increase their music knowledge and skills as they receive very little time within the BEd Primary program. By attending the workshop, students’ music coursework knowledge was extended. It gave them new ideas that they could use on placement (practicum) or in their future classrooms. The workshop provided participants the opportunity to work with strangers, listen to others, and create compositions through sounds and movement. It provided participants with a range of teaching strategies that could be adapted or adopted into future classrooms (de Vries, 2013; Lieberman & Mace 2010; Schmidt & Robbins, 2011). The workshops were interactive, it was not just a ‘show and tell’. Participants had to be reflective in what they were doing. They had to use their ‘teacher hat’ and think about pedagogical strategies to engage students in the primary classroom. During the workshop participants took notes, others listened, and many asked questions. This was done to support their understanding as research shows non-music specialists lack confidence to teach music (Russell-Bowie, 2009; Munday & Smith, 2010; Joseph, 2014; Baldwin & Beauchamp, 2014). Participating in the workshop gave ITE students the chance to experience PL with a professional organisation at a very low cost. It also offered them the opportunity to gain confidence to undertake PL in other learning areas whilst pursuing their studies.

When working in groups, participants had an element of control and ownership over their own learning (Stanley, 2011; Wei et al., 2009). They created their own sounds, graphic scores and soundscapes. The composition idea as a creative music activity was something participants felt they could do and “have a go”. The idea of employing children’s storybooks (text) opened up a whole new vista to integrate music into the primary classroom. The time given for questions and discussion during the workshop allowed participants the opportunity to clarify strategies employed by the presenters. In addition, the presenters offered ongoing support through ASME to help participants trial, implement or implement the curriculum. Harris and Jones (2017, p. 203) recognise that “this is rarely followed up” when working collaboratively with professional organisations.

The picture storybook about a *White whale called Migaloo* captured participants' imagination to create soundscapes and movement that could easily be adapted for a primary classroom. Many students thought "what a clever idea to use in classrooms" and commented on the "literacy links and mathematical connections" that could be made. Integrating music into the classroom is an important aspect of primary classrooms, as many ITE students may use it in their future classrooms (Pascoe et al., 2015). Most participants found the book *Ernie dances to the didgeridoo* a new learning experience. While the focus of this paper is not on teaching indigenous content (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020), participants felt through listening to the story they learnt "more about Aboriginal culture". They spoke of how they could use the book to address "cultural understandings and practices" in relation to meeting the Intercultural Capabilities set out in the Victorian Curriculum (VCAA, 2019).

The notion of professional learning through creative music workshops gave participants a first-hand experience to "play on music instruments I [they] never played before". For many, they learnt "how to use music in a creative and fun way" as most participants said they had little experience in composing. Working together in small groups (teachers and students) pushed participants out of their comfort zones. They had to draw on a range of ideas to come up with a group composition in a short time (Thorpe, 2017). In doing so, they reflected on their actions which turned out to be an exciting teaching and learning experience for all concerned (Schön, 1987).

## Conclusion

This study explored the experiences, engagement and connections of participants when undertaking professional learning. It also investigated the importance of professional organisations and universities working collaboratively to share music making practice. Working with professional organisations is an excellent way to build confidence to include music in the classroom and extend ITE students' content and pedagogical knowledge (Schiemann, 2016). At the organisational level, participating in professional learning workshops provides ITE students with the opportunity to gain evidence of meeting AITSL standards six and seven regarding "professional learning" and "engaging professionally with teaching networks" (AITSL, 2021). By working with ASME (VIC), ITE students are introduced to professional learning organisations, enabling them to learn from an early stage of their career about the need to be part of a community of practitioners (Graham, 2007; Wenger, 1998).

The ITE students were not compelled to undertake the workshops, rather, they were encouraged to attend. Those who attended found it met the AITSL graduate standards in relation to engaging with professional learning networks (AITSL, 2021). As I did not teach any of the ITE students in 2018 and 2019, there was no conflict of interest or power coercion. Rather, ITE students said they attended "because it was affordable", "informative" and "helped with teaching ideas for the primary classroom". One student summed it up by saying "we were exposed to people who shared high quality teaching strategies in a safe environment".

The findings from this case study at one university in Melbourne are not generalisable to other music professional organisations, ITE programs or universities. Between 2018 and 2019, the findings have shown the importance of collaborating with professional organisations. All participants felt they gained more than they had expected. Unfortunately the planned 2020 workshop did not proceed owing to the Covid-19 pandemic which induced closures of public events. From the participants' smiles, energy and laughter, the previous workshops proved a worthy initiative. In April 2021, ASME (VIC) offered a free *Zoom* professional learning workshop to the BEd Primary and Master of Teaching music students in April 2021. The workshop conducted by Dr Ros McMillan focused on 'approaching a teaching career'. Students found it beneficial, they said it "provided interesting insight and detailed examples of approaches to teaching primary music" and "presented ideas and lesson plans for primary school". Students felt "It was fantastic". One student in particular said "online professional learning is easily accessible for me and I am far more likely to be able to attend professional learning online". Another commented "from the PD, I have learnt new and creative ways to use music and learnt of the benefits it has on students learning". One summed it by saying "networking with professional organisations is incredibly useful to our development as teachers".

In light of this recent feedback, ongoing collaboration with professional organisations led by experts in the field is an important part of preparing ITE students to learn more about the profession and improve their pedagogical content knowledge (Stanley, Snell & Edgar, 2014). I encourage teacher educators to collaborate with professional organisations to provide practical, interactive, and informative professional learning opportunities that support early career teacher's professional identity, and their engagement in the profession. In addition, tertiary educators across learning areas are expected to inform ITE students of professional social networking sites that will enrich their learning as they 'engage with colleagues and improve practice' (AISTL, 2021).

Follow up research with ITE students could investigate how participants implemented some of the professional learning ideas when on placement, and in their future classroom practices. This research calls for a longitudinal study to be undertaken with music professional organisations across universities in Australia regarding music within ITE programs. I encourage academics in ITE programs to continue to work closely with professional organisations across learning areas to promote professional learning.

Writing a decade ago, Stephen Dinham (2010) made the point that

The biggest equity issue in Australian education today isn't computers, new buildings or equipment. It's each student having quality teachers and quality teaching in schools supported by effective leadership and professional learning in mutually respectful local community contexts" (Dinham, 2010, p.14).

I contend that higher education institutes need to work to collaboratively with professional organisations when preparing ITE students for the profession. Professional organisations have the capacity to share their expertise not only as users of pedagogical content knowledge, but also as creators, makers, propagators, and preservers of it.

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