



## TEACHING & LEARNING RESEARCH INITIATIVE

NĀU I WHATU TE KĀKAHU, HE TĀNIKO TAKU

### The Relationship between Participation in Singing Programmes and Student Well-Being in a Christchurch Primary School

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#### Intro / Project description

We investigated the perceived relationship between singing programmes and well-being in a school community affected by the Christchurch earthquakes. Singing programmes were introduced specifically to enhance well-being, and well-being scores mostly remain high despite extremely challenging conditions. We have been able to articulate the factors that have enabled the singing programmes to be developed and sustained, and to model the perceived relationship between classroom singing and well-being.

#### What were the aims of the project

Singing is a highly motivating medium that can have a positive impact on well-being; and the evidence that well-being influences learning is uncontested. We aimed to learn how to maximise the use of singing for well-being, and to inform other schools about the ways singing can support well-being especially during exceptionally difficult circumstances.

#### Why is this research important?

Other researchers have suggested group singing can lead to a general sense of well-being; and well-being is positively associated with potential to learn. Daily classroom singing can have a positive impact on learners' readiness for, and ability to engage with classroom learning. Our articulation of the factors involved in the development and maintenance of singing programmes, especially during a particularly difficult period, and our model of the correlations between singing and well-being, will encourage other school communities to consider singing to increase resilience and counter stress.

#### What we did

We engaged in Action Research. Data were gathered from teachers' journals; children's artworks and videos; individual interviews and focus groups with teachers and children; and well-being surveys. We explored how the singing was facilitated, our use of repertoire, how singing for well-being might differ from music education, and whether music education could also have intrinsic benefits that link to well-being. Inductive thematic analysis was applied independently to each set of data, after each cycle of learning. Themes from each cycle were compared and contrasted to uncover central themes. We also compared and contrasted three models of well-being outlined in the literature to extract key indicators before engaging in deductive analysis to uncover the relationship between key indicators and our core themes.

#### Key findings

We found that group singing elicits positive emotions, engenders a strong sense of connectedness, supports engagement and achievement related behaviours, and can be energising. However our findings also suggest that creative initiatives specifically introduced to address psycho-social well-being need to be targeted to the needs and resources of the community. Singing for well-being at our school is associated with high levels of student choice and is less structured than music education programmes, and its helpful impact appears to be associated with our need for a positive collective relational response to our shared experiences of stress.

#### Implications for practice

There is an urgent need for mental and emotional well-being support in New Zealand schools, especially for students with mental health issues (Boyd, Bonne & Berg, 2017). We have been able to develop and maintain daily singing programmes when conditions for well-being have been severely compromised and, given the encouraging reports from children, it seems likely that singing had a positive impact on well-being in our community; particularly in terms of affect, energy and connectedness. This success has a powerful message for wider education communities facing similar long-term challenges. Music making, which is not necessarily undertaken for the purpose of music education as it is traditionally understood, can be used to support and nurture the social, physical and mental well-being of learners who are vulnerable and at-risk. Further, the demonstration of important links between classroom singing and well-being and the relative ease with which singing can be facilitated, suggest all primary school teachers should have the resolution to 'just do it'. Singing, as an activity that can occur naturally in the classroom as both curriculum and therapeutic practice, can be a pragmatic way to address well-being in schools.

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