Got ‘em on a string: The collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers in Queensland

Graham R. Ashton

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BMus (School Music B)

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Queensland Conservatorium of Music
Faculty of Arts, Education, Law
Griffith University, Queensland, Australia
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**Abstract**

There appear to be considerable differences in the outcomes of group string teaching programs in Queensland. Some teachers appear to be able to generate, manage and administrate highly efficacious programs; others seem to experience difficulty transferring the knowledge and skills required for students to become successful string players. This study investigates the collective skills, knowledge and attributes apparent in group string teaching. As a case study with multiple participants, the investigation documents the reflections of group string pedagogues, observes the outcomes of their programs and teaching methods, and synthesises these elements into a profile of collective skills, knowledge, and attributes. The collective profile is then compared with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers mandated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), to ascertain points of corroboration and where there is a disconnect. Whilst there is significant overlap between the collective profile and the AITSL standards, some mismatch is evident. Implications of the study include the need to review the training and early-career mentoring of group instrumental music teachers.
Statement of Authorship

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signature: _____________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________
Acknowledgements

This research is written for prospective group instrumental teachers in Australia, in the hope that it might encourage better training and mentoring towards the effective nurturing of the musical potential in all children.

I would like to acknowledge the input I have received from my principal supervisors, Associate Professor Christopher Klopper and Graeme Jennings. Particular thanks are due to Associate Professor Christopher Klopper for his consistent in-depth feedback and mentoring throughout the post-graduate research journey.

I am particularly thankful for my wife, Cathy, and young adult children who have been so incredibly supportive of my endeavours in bringing this work to fruition. Your care has been greatly appreciated.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, the late John Kingsley Ashton, who was always supportive of my endeavours. Along with my mother, he afforded me every opportunity in life. It was he who encouraged me towards postgraduate studies.
Keywords

Group string teaching, collective profile, skills, knowledge, attributes, early career mentoring, professional standards for teachers
List of Abbreviations

AITSL – Australian Institute of Teachers and School Leaders
QCT – Queensland College of Teachers
NSPC – National String Project Consortium
DECD – Department of Education and Child Development
IMS – Instrumental Music Service
IMPACT – ACT Instrumental Music Program
ACARA – Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AUSTA – Australian Strings Association
AMEB – Australian Music Examinations Board
TVAAS – Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System
DETE – Department of Education, Training and Employment
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and rationale for the study

There appear to be considerable differences in the results of group string teaching programs in Australia (Murphy, Rickard, Gill, & Grimmett, 2011). Some teachers seem to be able to generate, manage and administrate highly successful programs (Carr, 2010; Stronge, 2002); and others seem to experience difficulty transferring the knowledge and skills required for students to become successful string players. Perhaps the latter category lack the teaching skills, the musical skills (Culver, 2003), the administrative skills, or the personality and behaviours (Cheng & Durrant, 2007; Mills & Smith, 2003; Wendell Yonker, 2000) needed to inspire prospective youngsters to sustain their commitment to instrumental tuition and succeed (Purdy, 2006).

The motivation for undertaking this research comes from the author’s own experience as a group string teacher in primary and secondary schools in Queensland, observations of fellow group string teachers in school settings, personal observation of the differing capacities of practitioners, and the considerable perceived variance between outcomes of programs from one school to another. The initial focus of this study was to gain an understanding of what is essential for group string teachers to be able to generate, manage and administrate successful programs. The study set out to ascertain how the participant teachers achieve their outcomes, and to distil a list of collective skills, knowledge and attributes of these practitioners. Earlier studies have framed the characteristics and qualities of experienced string teachers, both in one-to-one and class teaching situations (Carr, 2010; Thompson, 1984). This study builds upon previous research by compiling a collective profile of group string teachers in Queensland, and then goes on to place this profile against the professional teaching standards mandated by such bodies as the Australian Institute for
Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT). The endeavour here is to discover points of corroboration and areas of disconnect between the collective group string-teacher profile and the professional teaching standards, and enquire as to the way ahead for a productive interface between specialist teaching areas and mandated professional standards in education, and proffer suggestions for further research.

**Anticipated outcomes**

It was anticipated that there would be a significant overlap in the skills, knowledge and attributes of all of the practitioners in this study. It was likely that there would be similarities in program characteristics, curriculum design, parental and school support, funding, and student and teacher relationships. However, it was probable that there would be a degree of divergence in approach as regards specific tutor books and methods of instruction, and, in particular, personalised approaches that have been built over extensive periods of time by the teachers. The unknown concerned points of overlap and variance between the participant profiles, and the degree to which similarity and digression were evident.

As a qualitative case study, the testing of expected outcomes was achievable. Using semi-structured interviews, observations of classes, ensemble rehearsals and performances, and perusal of artifacts like participant-generated tutor books, teaching materials and teacher-parent/career communication tools, the generation of data was readily achieved. Thematic analysis was undertaken to indentify key themes or recurring emergent patterns (Yap, 2013), as well as to encompass divergent aspects in the group string teaching dynamic of each of the participants.
Implications of the study

There are a number of implications issuing from this study. Firstly, it is suggested that consideration needs to be given to developing a subset of professional teacher standards which encompass specialist teaching areas similar to group instrumental instruction. Secondly, a program of mentoring of early-career group instrumental teachers appears necessary to avert current levels of “praxis shock” (Ballantyne, 2007), and enable more rapid progress and development of young group instrumental specialists towards the advanced levels of mandated professional teacher standards. Coupled with this there may need to be some further enhancement in the tertiary training and preparation of group instrumental teachers. The third issue arising is with regards to teaching qualification requirements for group instrumental teachers. Currently group instrumental teachers do not need a tertiary teaching qualification to join the profession, unlike mainstream class teachers. Perhaps this anomaly needs reviewing.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In reviewing the literature relevant to this study, the point of departure has been to consider the broader landscape of generalist teaching and then focus on the specific area of group instrumental teaching, in particular, group string teaching. To what degree does teacher quality impact upon student learning? What are the essential characteristics of teachers? How do teacher education, training and mentoring affect the ability of teachers to deliver quality education to students? How then do these issues apply to the arena of group string teaching?

Teacher quality and its impact on student learning

Research consistently demonstrates that teaching quality is the greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes (Ainley, 2013). Rowe (2003) notes that empirical evidence indicates that the proportion of variation in students’ achievement and progress due to differences in student background and ability is considerably less important (9-15 %) than variation associated with class/teacher membership (30-60 %).

There appears to be an association between high-quality teacher workforces, and high-performing students. In many high-performing education systems, teaching is a high-status occupation, teacher education students are recruited from the top school graduates each year, and there is ongoing investment in the professional development of teachers (Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann, & Burns, 2012).

Sanders and Horn (1998) assert that the effectiveness of the teacher is the major determinant of student academic progress. They comment further that teacher effects on student achievement have been found to be both additive and cumulative with little evidence that subsequent effective teachers can offset the effects of ineffective ones.

Essential characteristics of teachers

Stronge (2002) argues that there are common attributes that characterise exemplary teachers. These features include the personhood of the teacher as an individual, preparation,
classroom management, planning, implementation and monitoring of student progress. He notes further key areas including pedagogical preparation and content knowledge, care for the students themselves, an enthusiasm for teaching and learning, an expectation that students will learn, and the significance of the teacher’s verbal ability.

The ability to communicate is one of the most important qualities of a good teacher (Cheng & Durrant, 2007). An individual who can communicate effectively with people at all levels, of both genders, and from differing backgrounds and cultures will shine in their field of expertise (Kopke, 2003).

In a study by Plunkett (2004) of the characteristics of highly qualified teachers, she noted four recurring qualities identified by participants: a) pedagogy, b) intrinsic qualities, c) content knowledge, and d) engaging students. The intrinsic qualities listed by respondents in her study were various, and ranged from a sense of humour to a strong work ethic, and from confidence in their teaching ability to being compassionate. There is some difficulty in quantifying these dimensions, since to be “intrinsic” implies a sense of innateness. Perhaps this is part of the “X-factor” which makes for great teachers.

Plunkett (2004) took the information from a study by Patrick and Smart (1998) and created a meta-inventory of the characteristics of effective teachers. Included in the inventory were three categories, with qualities assigned to each: a) personal attributes - sense of humour, patient, charismatic personality, looks good, role model, good speaking voice, fair, flexible, enthusiastic, good communicator, understanding, giving of themselves, wise, likes teaching, organised; b) pedagogy - challenging, knows subject well, uses many examples, uses many teaching methods; and c) student interactions - motivates students, encourages students, believes in students, gives positive feedback to students, respects students, sensitive to student needs, cares for students, develops personal relationship with students, listens to
students, has an interest in students, treats students as equals, gets and holds student attention, is available for outside class contact, stimulates students involvement in the learning process.

**Critical aspects of teacher education, training and mentoring**

There is some evidence about specific components of initial teacher education that are effective. Levine (2006) concluded that the best programs of study share the following characteristics: they are committed to preparation of excellent teachers and they clearly define what an excellent teacher needs to know and be able to do; the field component of the curriculum is sustained, begins early, and provides immediate application of theory to real classroom situations; there is a close connection between the teacher education program and the schools in which the students teach, including ongoing collaboration between academic and clinical faculties; and all have high graduation standards.

Ingvarson and Rowe (2008) found that teaching quality could be attained only by ensuring that teachers are equipped with subject matter knowledge and an evidence-and-standards-based repertoire of pedagogical skills that are demonstrably effective in meeting the developmental and learning needs of all students for whom they have responsibility. Research conducted in 2004 by the Australian Council of Education Research found that making teacher education programs highly “practical” and “school-based” does not compensate for a lack of content knowledge (Ingvarson, 2006).

Gore, Ladwig, Griffiths, and Amosa, (2007) note three key positions in debates about the fundamental purposes and nature of teacher education: a view that what matters most is the teacher’s deep knowledge of the field being taught (liberal and discipline-based education); a view that knowledge of how to teach is most critical to successful teaching and learning (scientific and/or apprenticeship approaches to learning to teach); and a view that teachers ought to be concerned with the social justice implications of their work. They go on to delineate numerous findings and implications from their study. They note that broad
evidence from many different studies conducted around the world indicates that the quality of
teaching matters for students and that teacher education must place priority on preparing
teachers who can deliver high quality pedagogy and provide all students with quality learning
experiences.

Stronge (2002) argues “teaching experience matters in teacher effectiveness and
student achievement, at least to a certain point”. Experienced teachers typically have a greater
repertoire from which to generate fluid, meaningful lessons, and incorporate and organise
routines for the monitoring of students. He suggests that five to eight years seems to be the
time needed to master the art of teaching.

Gore, Williams, and Ladwig (2006), on the other hand, maintain that in spite of
common perceptions that early career teachers are lacking knowledge and skills, there
appears to be no statistically significant relationship between years of experience and quality
of teaching. If pedagogical quality is to be improved, and if years of experience do not
necessarily lead to better quality teaching, then preservice preparation, aimed at equipping
teachers to deliver high quality pedagogy, becomes all the more critical, and professional
development for practicing teachers must play a role in assisting teachers to improve the
quality of pedagogy.

There is a significant body of research regarding the importance of classroom
management in creating an environment that makes effective teaching and learning possible
(Barnes, 2010; Pearce, 2008; Stronge, 2002). Research points beyond the effect of classroom
management on student achievement, to the attrition rates of new teachers, stress levels of
teachers, and the behaviour of disadvantaged students as significant factors in the teaching
and learning process (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).
Ingvarson (2006) notes the difficulty which universities experience in finding supervising teachers sufficiently trained to be effective student teacher supervisors in schools. Hobson, Ashby, Malderez and Tomlinson (2009) look at the conditions for successful mentoring, such as effective selection and preparation of mentors. Mentoring is, in part, a means of encouraging retention of newly qualified teachers, in particular to assist them through the arduous phase of praxis-shock experienced by many new graduates in the teaching profession (Ballantyne, 2007).

The evidence from literature in this review suggests, then, that high-quality teachers produce high level performance in students, and that rigorous undergraduate training and purposeful mentoring of new teachers, as well as significant professional development opportunities, are essential to producing great teachers.

**Group instrumental teaching**

Group instrumental teaching in this study refers to the teaching of instruments, be they orchestral or band, in homogeneous (single instrument) or heterogeneous (mixed instruments, generally of one family, e.g., strings, brass) classes.

Numerous studies have been undertaken to consider areas such as the principles and procedures of instrumental teaching in groups (Thompson, 1984), how to build successful string programs (Carr, 2010), the benefits of group string teaching (Quaine, 2011), and lessons learned in group string teaching programs (Murphy, et.al, 2011). In this study the focus is on establishing a collective profile of skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers, and seeing what the level of correlation is with the professional standards mandated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

Schulte (2004) comments, “The teacher is the single most important component of a successful first-year string class” (p. 134). In instrumental music classes, some additional
external factors may influence learning. Student access to instruments, level of student practice, parental support, and class lesson scheduling conflicts are external factors that may affect achievement levels. However, it seems that the major influence on student learning is the overall competence of the teacher (Ihas, 2006).

The consensus appears to be that structure and content of lessons, teacher personality and behaviours, and the ability to provide motivation to learn are the most significant factors in determining the successful outcomes of group instruction. Probably the most important feature of class lessons is the fact that many students, especially younger ones, actually prefer to study in a class with their peers (Kohut, 1966; Quaine, 2011). Quaine (2011) notes “the numerous reasons for choosing to teach strings in groups – budgetary constraints, timetabling and staffing efficiency, integration into the school curriculum, as support and extension activities for individual tuition, ensemble experience and as a broad based recruitment for orchestral programs to name but a few” (p. 23). He underscores the benefits of group teaching as one of the recurring similarities between the Suzuki\(^1\) and Rolland\(^2\) approaches to string teaching.

**Survey of international developments in group music tuition**

Group music tuition is not a recent phenomenon. In nineteenth century England, hundreds of thousands of adults participated in sight-singing classes. “Massive participation in sight-singing classes and inexpensive ‘Concerts for the People’ led to the introduction of violin classes for adults….Some 400 or 500 raw recruits may be seen fiddling like one, in

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\(^1\) Shinichi Suzuki was the founder of the music education movement known as the Suzuki Method. The method came to notoriety internationally, in the late 1950’s. It is based on the notion that all children learn their mother tongue through listening, imitation and repetition. Suzuki extrapolated this idea to the learning of music.

Suzuki Talent Education of Australia (Victoria) Inc

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\(^2\) Paul Rolland was a renowned American string pedagogue whose crowning achievement, a film series and book entitled ‘The Teaching of Action in String Playing’ positively impacted upon string teaching across the world from the late 1960’s. The emphasis is on motion skill in the art of string playing, where freedom of movement is, from the outset, of paramount importance in the instruction of students.

The Teaching of Action in String Playing.
more or less correct unison, every Saturday evening” (Deverich, 2013a, para. 5). Violin class instruction was introduced into English schools towards the end of the 1800s, and the Maidstone School Orchestra Association was born. The movement burgeoned, and at the height of its popularity just before the First World War, 400,000, or a tenth of the state school population participated in orchestra classes (Deverich, 2013a).

Numerous music education historians cite the British Maidstone Movement as a significant force in the development of school instrumental music in the United States of America (Deverich, 2013b). In the early twentieth century, class instrumental programs multiplied prodigiously, and many group instrumental tuition methods were published. Of interest to this study is the emergence of the heterogeneous class approach at this time. Heterogeneous group instruction has become the mainstay of group string tuition in schools in the USA today, as it is in the state school programs across Queensland.

In nineteenth century Australia, the English choral singing movement was transplanted into schools “not so much for its intrinsic values but as a form of pedagogy for instilling (through the words of school songs) moral, patriotic and religious values in children (Stephens, 1997). The need was seen as more pressing in New South Wales and Victoria during the 1850s “given the ‘convict taint’ and the influx of immigrants of often dubious moral character to the goldfields” (Stephens, 1997, p. 397).

Instrumental music in schools in the colonial era was limited to drum and fife bands, with the obvious connection to the military drill taught in many schools (Stephens, 1997). Whilst singing-based programs, music appreciation classes, recorder classes and other class music programs became widespread in schools across Australia throughout the twentieth century, group instrumental instruction on orchestral instruments only became a significant
force in schools from the 1970s, with varying levels of government funding and support evident across the different states and territories (Stephens, 1997).

The development of group instrumental instruction in Australian schools has paralleled an incredible advancement of group string pedagogy on an international level in the last fifty years. Numerous internationally recognised pedagogues have developed thorough and effective programs which have greatly impacted the music education landscape worldwide.

The Colourstrings\(^3\) method, developed in Finland over the past forty years by the Szilvay brothers, is grounded in Kodaly principles. The premise is that students learn to read and play music just like they learn their mother tongue (Holt, 2009). Music is presented to the child as a whole package including instrumental technique and musical listening, whilst balancing understanding and emotional development at the same time (Salmela, 2012). Based on Kodaly philosophy, an environment is cultivated in which singing, playing games and instruments live side by side, for the happiness of the child.

At the East Helsinki Music Institute\(^4\), children enjoy individual tuition, homogenous group lessons, sol-fa training and orchestral experience as part of the whole package (Holt, 2009). Edgerton (2005) remarks,

The instrumental tutors are not limited only to teaching manual dexterity movements by the two hands, but tend to give the whole music as an ‘art package’ to the child,

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\(^3\) Colourstrings is string teaching method developed by Hungarian-born brothers Geza and Csaba Szilvay. Begun in the early 1970s in Finland, the method targeted pre-school and early school age children in a Kodaly-based, all-round musical training program culminating in the learning of orchestral stringed instruments. The distinguishing feature is that each of the four strings is assigned a different colour and represented by a different figure (for violin, a bear, man, woman and bird correspond to the G, D, A and E strings respectively)

\(^4\) The East Helsinki Music Institute was established in 1965 with the aim of giving extensive music curriculum training for children and young people. It has become a music institution of international renown because of its association with Szilvay and Colourstrings.
where the developing of instrumental technique, musical hearing, understanding and
the musical emotions occur in equilibrium all the time. (p. 20)

Edgerton (2005) notes further that the nurturing of the whole child has created the
following traits in Colourstrings-raised students: fine intonation; sophisticated left and right
hand technique; a developed musical intellect; excellent reading skills; an aptitude for
musical colours and phrasing; and rich creativity developed through transposing, composing
and improvising. Szilvay’s approach emphasises reading skills from the outset (although
there is a great deal of preparatory notation and symbol usage before the introduction of the
standard, western, five-line staff notation, which is first introduced in Book C).

Historically, there has been a long and vibrant expression of group string teaching in
the USA (Deverich, 2013b). One of the most influential pedagogues in more recent times was
1974, opened the door to new ideas based on the physical movements essential to playing the
violin. Many of his teaching techniques have been incorporated into string teaching
approaches worldwide. A significant part of the technique-building components of Szilvay’s
Colourstrings tutor books is reminiscent of developments made by Rolland.

Around the same time that Rolland was developing his approach, the Suzuki method
began to make major inroads into the American setting. In the words of its founder, the intent
is “to get education changed from mere instruction to education in the real sense of the word -
education that inculcates, brings out, develops the human potential, based on the growing life
of the child” (Haugland, 2009, p. 29). Glenn, in Barnes (2003), considers that teaching
beginner string classes by rote, which is the undergirding tenet of the Suzuki approach, “does
not compromise students’ reading ability” (p. 5). He found positive results in the continuation
of students who were taught by rote.
A more recent development in the USA, the National String Project Consortium (NSPC), is a collective of some thirty-six string teaching sites across the USA, and is dedicated to increasing the number of children playing stringed instruments, as well as addressing the critical shortage of string teachers in the USA. It does this by supporting the creation and growth of “String Projects” at universities across the country. Not only do these String Projects give children the opportunity to study a stringed instrument - they also provide practical hands-on training for undergraduate string education majors during their college years. As a result, the undergraduates who teach in these programs gain valuable experience prior to graduating and seeking work placements.

Byo & Cassidy (2005) conducted a program evaluation of thirteen String Projects and concluded, from the data collected in the study, that the basic tenets of the NSPC have been replicated across the USA to the point where success transcends individual project directors, master teachers, and geographic locations. Byo and Cassidy (2005) further noted that music teaching as a career is promoted effectively when music teachers relate positively to students, demonstrate a love of teaching, create an uplifting environment, and provide opportunity for students to teach and conduct.

English string pedagogue, Sheila Nelson established a successful group string teaching program, which began in the mid-1970s. It became known internationally as “The Tower Hamlets Project” (Nelson, 1985). She worked with Paul Rolland in the mid-1970s, and that experience had a significant impact upon her teaching approach. The result was seen

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5 Originally formed in 1998, under the auspices of the American String Teachers Association, the National String Project Consortium is dedicated to increasing the number of children playing stringed instruments, and addressing the shortage of string teachers in the United States of America. Undergraduate string majors are given hands-on training opportunities, whilst instructing children who otherwise would not have the opportunity to learn.

6 English string pedagogue, composer and author, Sheila Nelson, is known for her innovative group string teaching venture conducted from the late 1970s through the 1980’s in schools in a deprived area in London, as well as her authorship of significant instructional material for young string students.

7 “Tower Hamlets” is the name of a London borough after which Sheila Nelson’s group string teaching program is named. The schools in which she and her team worked are located in this area.
in her use of movement, with “circular bowing patterns” and “elbow-wiggling movements” introduced in the beginning lessons, and activities, like “whole-body movement”, “lifted bowings, flapping wings and whitewashing walls” (p. 86) incorporated. Starting the program “from scratch”, she notes retrospectively that in her first year she was astonished at the “speed at which (she and her teaching team) attempted to move” (p. 70). The “extra teachers present” (p. 70) provided assistance to the children to develop correct physical movement patterns via a “hands-on” teaching approach. This hands-on approach has remained an essential part of the large group process. “Besides the group leader there will be a pianist, a cello teacher and an assistant teacher for each row of children behind the first, during the early days when a lot of handling is needed to convey physical movements” (p. 74). Nelson (1985) notes further, “The team leader in each school is responsible for liaising with the head teacher, staff and school keeper, arranging concerts, supplying the school with music charts, and arranging timetables” (p. 77-78).

Selection of children in Nelsons’ program was initially on a “[h]ands up those who would like to play” (p. 70) basis. Rolland’s teaching methods formed the basis of all classes, with particular emphasis on physical movement. Playing by ear was encouraged, as an aid to good intonation. Interestingly, step-wise movement was settled on for early reading experiences. Nelson felt that the widely spread open string notes on the treble staff were difficult for the students to connect with visually (easier for cellists since the top, middle and bottom lines of the bass clef pass through the note heads). Whereas Rolland favoured the octave between the open string and the stopped note on the string above (for the sake of left hand shape and left elbow position on the violin), Nelson settled on stepwise movement, initially using only the first finger in conjunction with the open strings.

One major problem to the small child is that adding a finger to go up makes sense, and taking one away to go down. But on changing strings, you have to take away
finger on the way up, and add them on the way down. The music gives very little clue to this mystery unless a different colour is used for each string. (Nelson, 1985, p.73)

Significant British string teachers since Nelson’s pioneering work have continued with the stepwise movement using only the first finger and the open strings. Katherine and Hugh Colledge⁸, and Kathy and David Blackwell⁹ have published early tutor and string ensemble material which uses this approach fairly exclusively.

More recently in England, after extensive inspection of a wide variety of classroom and instrumental programs, findings were summarised in the Ofsted Report (2012). The conclusion was that the best lessons, whether they are whole-class, individual or small-group instrumental, combined learning of instrumental techniques with the development of wider musical understanding. With regards to string teaching, it was noted that achievements were good when pupils developed solid string-playing technique whilst at the same time making concrete progress in their general musical understanding. These two aspects of achievement were found to be interrelated and co-dependent (Ofsted Report, 2012).

These international developments detailing group string teaching pedagogy and methods have had, in one way or another, a highly significant impact upon all of the participants in this study. Some of the teaching strategies have been overtly adopted; others have been subsumed into the instructional process of the participants. But the roots of the approaches and methods developed by the three subjects can be traced clearly.

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⁸ British string teaching and publishing team, Kathy and David Blackwell, have published many books for young string players with Oxford University Press. These include both repertoire books for string tuition as well as ensemble music for young string ensembles.

⁹ English string specialists, Katherine and Hugh Colledge, have written a series of repertoire for young string players, as well as a number of compilations of junior string ensemble music.
National developments in group music tuition

Within Australia, the state governments of the various states and territories manage their own instrumental programs in very different ways. Hoegh-Guldberg (2006) states:

Support for instrumental and vocal music is provided centrally for government schools in four of the States and Territories: Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. These services include low cost instrument hire schemes and music libraries. In the other States and in the independent schools sector, instrumental and vocal tuition is most often provided at an individual school level and on a user pays basis (p. 8).

In Queensland, state government-funded group instrumental programs began in state schools in 1971 (Stephens, 1997), with the vast majority of schools across the state still continuing to offer group tuition in strings and/or band instruments. According to Langbroek (2013), Queensland is the only state or territory that provides a widespread, free, specialist instrumental music program, apart from Tasmania. In Queensland, over 400 instrumental music teachers instruct more than 50,000 children band and orchestral instruments in small groups, as well as conduct ensemble rehearsals involving these students (Langbroek, 2013).

There is no blanket instrumental program supervised or financed by the New South Wales state government in primary and secondary schools. Individual schools elect to operate and fund their own programs. “The Arts Unit” is an education department initiative which caters for centrally-based large ensemble rehearsal and performance programs, and some online workshop music programs, but they do not cater for group instrumental tuition. Since the late 1970s, Regional Conservatoriums have been developed to provide music education opportunities to students outside of Sydney. These conservatoriums are partially funded by the NSW Department of Education and Communities.
Partial financing of instrumental music programs in secondary schools by The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is supplemented by funding generated by individual schools in Victoria (Van Oosten, 2009). Schools are allocated a dollar amount with which to employ their own instrumental music teachers. Each region has an instrumental music coordinator responsible for the instrumental music program and allocation of program funds to schools in their region (Education and Training Committee Inquiry, 2013, p 126). The education department does not fund instrumental music programs in primary schools. It is common for Victorian primary schools to provide instrumental music lessons on a user-pays basis (Education and Training Committee Inquiry, 2013, p 37).

The West Australian Instrumental Music Services to Schools provides instrumental music programs in more than 450 government primary and secondary schools, reaching more than 15,000 students from years 3 to 12. In addition to weekly small group instrumental lessons, students have opportunities to participate in enrichment music activities which combine students working collaboratively across year levels and with students from other schools. Access to the School of Instrumental Music service is only available to schools that provide a classroom music program (Letts, 2013). Instrumental music teachers are employees of the Office of Government Schools, part of the Department of Education in Western Australia. They are appointed to the School of Instrumental Music which manages day-to-day business of the teachers in conjunction with the principals of the schools in which the teachers are staff members. The School of Instrumental Music also has a number of program coordinators. Instrumental programs are planned in a particular school cluster so that continuity can be guaranteed for students from primary to secondary school.
In South Australia, the Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) wholly operate some of the music programs whilst others are offered in partnership with outside agencies. Established in 1962, the Instrumental Music Service (IMS) provides a state wide instrumental music program for students across Years 3 – 12. A broad range of instrumental and vocal tuition is delivered through small group tuition. The IMS works in partnership with schools to establish and maintain music programs of quality and excellence (Instrumental Music Service Staff Handbook, 2014). There is a mix of DECD pay-rolled staff and private itinerants who teach in the schools. Preference for allocation of government funds is given to schools: where programs in instrumental music are part of a sustainable planned music curriculum; where programs lead to student participation in orchestral, band and choral ensembles; that provide budgetary support for students in the instrumental program; which provide transitional pathways in instrumental music from primary schools to related secondary schools.

In the Northern Territory, small group tuition on brass, woodwind and percussion instruments is available, free of charge, to students from year 5 and upwards, in all government schools in Darwin, Palmerton, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, and Nhulunbuy. Guitar, voice and keyboard tuition are offered on a more restricted basis. Orchestral strings are not offered as a part of the program. The Northern Territory Music School operates a competency based assessment and reporting system linked to the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework.

The ACT Instrumental Music Program (IMPACT) began in the 1970s as part of the ACT Education and Training Directorate. Currently ten itinerant music specialists cater for over 2000 students. Woodwind, brass and percussion tuition is the mainstay, with fife, recorder and ukulele more recent additions to the program. Students can audition to be part of co-curricular bands and ensembles, which rehearse after-hours.
In Tasmania, instrumental music classes are organised by the Department of Education on a fee-for-service basis. Schools are allocated instrumental teaching staff based on numbers of students, and individual schools determined how funds are allocated (Letts, 2013).

An apparent feature of school instrumental programs across Australia is that teachers implementing these programs are often inadequately trained or under-prepared – untrained in the relevant musical skills and/or educational objectives. Klopper and Power (2012) cite Clinch (1983) as commenting that the majority of these “qualified instrumental teachers” were trained by institutions whose main objective was to train them to be musicians, not teachers.

Clinch (1983) also notes that untold problems have been created by the employment of trained performers who are unable to gain employment as players and instead turn to teaching. He notes that these people lack the skills and understanding of the educational objectives involved in the formation, control and administration of school student ensembles. He asserts that the instrumental teacher needs all the skills of the classroom teacher in addition to the skills and knowledge of instrumental music. Trained performers do not have these skills without the relevant teacher training.

In a more recent study of one-to-one teaching at conservatories, Carey, Grant, McWilliam, and Taylor (2013) raise the issue of the distinction between the great performer and the great teacher, noting that these profiles describe different roles and differing skills in differing contexts.

The tension between the ‘maestro performer’ and the ‘maestro teacher’ alludes to the imperfect reality that as performers, teachers are not always sharply aware of their pedagogical practices; nor do they always have the language or the tools to articulate
their performance practices to students, or their pedagogical practices to researchers or interested others. (p. 153)

Another issue is that of group instrumental teaching versus one-to-one teaching. Group instrumental teaching in Australia has often been the result of economic imperatives and not educational objectives. If coordinated by trained teachers with skills in teaching in groups, the results can be educationally advantageous. In fact the educational advantages of teaching in groups far outweigh those of one-to-one when the correct programs are set up and taught with skill (Clinch 1983).

Erickson (1983) adds further pertinent comment to the situation with the instrumental teaching program in Queensland schools, noting that, at that time when he wrote, “no sure supply of qualified instrumental teachers is at present available, and as yet no course has been established within the State to provide such a supply” (p. 2). Erickson goes further in predicting, “that in ten years' time... a sure supply of qualified and competent instrumental teachers will be available” [emphasis added].

Interestingly, lack of formal qualification is a notable theme for instrumental specialists across Australia. In Victoria, “Where a fully qualified teacher cannot be found for a position, an unqualified teacher may be employed. These teachers are classified as ‘paraprofessionals’” (Van Oosten, 2009). In South Australia, there needs to be direct supervision by a registered teacher at the site of the unregistered instrumental instructor, where clear direction about the nature of the instruction is provided.

Where the instructor is not a registered teacher, that instructor will be considered to work with the status of an assistant to the classroom teacher at the school….If the instructor does not hold teacher registration…then the site is responsible for oversight
as to the content and delivery of the instruction” (Dennis, 2014, pp. 2-3).

An instrumental specialist working in Queensland schools does not require a formal teaching qualification. Applicants must complete an Instrumental Music Proficiency Assessment Application Form, which states, “Any person appointed to a permanent or temporary position at a school must possess current registration as a teacher with Queensland College of Teachers or a current ‘Working with Children’ check (Blue Card).”

Klopper and Power (2012, p. 86) comment on the response of one of the teachers in their study of a regional Australian conservatorium program as having no set standards, syllabus or Curriculum: “I also enjoy the fact that you haven’t got a strict syllabus. So you can think of the pupil. Think of what motivates them and then choose something suitable” (Teacher). This follows a child-centred approach, but also has the potential to perpetuate a cycle of teaching in the way that the teacher was taught. The suggestion here is not that all past teaching experiences are problematic, but simply that the untrained, unqualified instrumental teacher could contribute to maintaining static teaching approaches that are not reflective of current trends and methods.

**Group instrumental teaching and nationally mandated teacher standards**

It is evident, then, that there is a wide range of approaches to the delivery of instrumental tuition across the different states and territories in Australia. Whilst standard classroom practitioners are un-employable without the compulsory tertiary teacher-training relevant to their various fields of expertise, it is apparent that the expectation for pay-rolled instrumental teachers across all states and territories falls short in this respect.

With mandated professional standards for teachers across both the national and state levels, what response can be given to the disparity between the professional requirements for
general classroom teachers and the expectations for instrumental teachers? What correlation is there between the competencies demonstrated by the teachers participating in this study and the standards for proficiency in teaching as listed by bodies such as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT). Is there a subset of competencies by which successful group string teachers can be identified?

Another facet of the present study involves the relationship of group instrumental tuition to the framing of the national curriculum for The Arts, as outlined by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), (2013). How are the competencies delineated by AITSL and QTC incorporated into ACARA? What provision has been made for group instrumental teaching in ACARA’s national curriculum for the Arts? What are the curriculum frameworks and what is the actual practice and outworking of them?

In the Revised Draft Australian Curriculum: The Arts Foundation to Year 10 (2013) there is no provision for group instrumental tuition delivered by specialist instrumental teachers. This may have implications for the continuing delivery of group instrumental tuition around the country, in particular the states and territories where group tuition programs are the most developed, and are thoroughly embedded within the curriculum. Queensland and Western Australia are the states that stand to be most significantly impacted by the lack of provision for group instrumental tuition in the national curriculum.

In the National Review of School Music Education, 2005, Pascoe, et al., detail an extensive list of recommendations to the Commonwealth Government, including numerous recommendations on the preparation of instrumental teachers in tertiary music institutions and conservatoires. Underscored is the necessity for conservatoire to enhance or transform courses for specialist music teachers (including instrumental and vocal music teachers) to
ensure that students develop and demonstrate contemporary approaches to knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to the needs of specific groups of students.

Internationally, there have been consistent pedagogical advances in the approach to group string teaching in past fifty years. Whilst these advances have infiltrated somewhat the approaches of group string teachers across Australia, there are still apparent gaps in the teacher-preparation for, and delivery of, string teaching around the country.

In Australia, access for school children to group instrumental programs varies considerably across the different states and territories. The qualification requirement for teachers working in these programs is also varied and inconsistent. Perhaps the only point of commonality is that instrumental teachers in Australia do not need the formal teaching qualifications which are prerequisite to becoming a classroom teacher. This creates a potential tension whereby there is a double standard – classroom teachers in all disciplines require formal teaching qualifications; instrumental teachers do not.

A priori themes

In a study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of group instrumental teaching, Thompson (1984) used interviews and conversations, case studies and in vivo observations, and interpretations and speculations to reach his conclusions. Pro formas were constructed to record, via observation, the use of time, teacher performance, and student outcomes. The students’ acquisition of skills, the teacher’s dissemination of information, and attention to teaching musicianship, became focal areas for the instrumental activity pro formas used. A student observation pro forma considered levels of commitment, acquisition of skills, musicianship, information, and social interaction. In the present study, data included semi-structured interviews, in vivo observations, and perusal of artifacts (teaching resources and materials).
Thompson (1984) offered a number of a priori themes as a starting point for a study that he designed to generate a composite picture of the principles and procedures for group string teaching compared with individual tuition. He proposed that: it is possible for all students to be engaged for the greatest part of the lesson time; that group-taught students spend more time in musicianship than in individual instrumental teaching situations; that group lessons engender the acquisition of skill, information and musicianship; that group cohesion points to the adoption of group values by the members; that a wider range of skills can be taught in a group situation; that higher levels of preparation, interaction and awareness are needed when teaching groups; that there is a greater emphasis on heuristic (discovery) learning; and that the teacher must maintain an awareness of the individual within the group.

In his analysis of group instrumental teaching, Thompson (1984) stated that the intent of his research was “to build a composite picture of the principles and procedures of teaching groups.” Ascertaining parallels between the various interviewees, in terms of points of comparison and points of contrast, was the goal. Analysis ran in three stages: firstly, general information gathering (data collection) from a questionnaire; then clustering of like ideas (categorisation); and finally distillation of the “major foci” (themes) surfacing from the research. Anomalies were also given due consideration in the process of analysis. The current study has some parallels with Thompson’s work. The difference is that this study has the initial goal of generating a collective profile of the group string teachers, themselves, and their skills, knowledge and attributes, rather than looking at the principles of group instrumental teaching.

As in Thompson’s work, where hypotheses “were drawn from the practitioners themselves…using their language and conceptual structures,” (Thompson 1984, p. 157) in this study the individual and collective profiles are built from the participants’ views and comments. Likewise, where “cross-checking …was the main strategy of validation,”
(Thompson 1984, p. 158), “member-checking” was employed in this study as a tool for verification of respondents’ comments.

**Essential characteristics of group string teachers**

The first strategy for establishing string programs in schools is to find a competent teacher (Gillespie, 2010). The teacher profile that he outlines for this task is one who can attract interest and support for the program quickly, recruits students effectively, loves music and children, and is an excellent string teacher.

Whilst having a solid grasp of the content and process of group instrumental teaching is significant, more importantly the teacher must connect with the students and community on many levels (Lautzenheiser, 1992, p 43). In her study, Davis (2006) found that beginning college students and student teachers identified the most important attributes for teacher success as musicality, personality, and teaching ability. The students in the study ranked personal skills as the most important for teacher success, and teaching skill and musical skills second and third, respectively. General competencies and characteristics needed by music teachers were studied by Kvet and Watkins (1993). The four factors that they ascertained as contributing to success in music teaching include: musical ability and positive feeling for music; proactive personality characteristics; understanding and organising for individual differences; and external factors affecting the teaching process.

In the recruiting phase of this study, the intention was to locate and recruit experienced string teachers, on the assumption that teaching experience has a bearing on teacher efficacy and student outcomes (Stronge, 2002). Carr (2010) conducted a study on the perspectives of experienced string teachers using a questionnaire to gather data. From this she distilled a list of personal traits of the group string teachers. Whilst she did not interview the participants or conduct observations of their classes, the findings that the author compiles are
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pertinent to the current study because commonalities in skill, knowledge and attributes of the teachers are forthcoming. This study goes beyond Carr’s work by using semi-structured interviews, teacher observations, and examination of artifacts, rather than just a questionnaire, to build the individual and collective profiles. Being a teacher involves more than just making music with children. Carr (2010) noted that essential managerial elements in an effective program include organizational skills, time management, money management, planning, patience, and communication.

Aspects of group string classes

There are certain technical foundations that need to be established in the early phase of learning a stringed instrument. Przygocki (2004) notes:

For string players in their first year of study (typically year 4 or 5 in the American system), some important goals are to give students an excellent basic technical setup; develop skills in pitch, pulse, and rhythm; and give them basic music reading skills.

Good basic position, right- and left-hand setup, and bow arm motions are vital…. An excellent technical and musical foundation after the first two years will enable students to begin acquiring intermediate level skills, such as extensions, shifting, vibrato, and the ability to play in a variety of keys. (p. 44)

Przygocki (2004) notes further that the sequence in which skills are taught is best determined by a developmental [emphasis added] model rather that a subject logic sequence. Citing Choksy in reference to the Kodaly\textsuperscript{10} method, he comments, “In a subject logic approach there is no relationship between the order of presentation and the order in which

\textsuperscript{10} Zoltan Kodaly, a music educator from Hungary, sought to address what he saw as major weaknesses in the music education system of his native country, in the early to mid twentieth century. The ‘Kodaly Method’ is distinguished from other methods in that the voice is used as the instrument for music instruction. The approach is based upon the philosophy that everyone is innately musical and that music serves to develop an individual on all levels – emotional, spiritual and intellectual. The Kodaly Method incorporates a unique course of sequential musical instruction ideally based upon the folk music of the child’s cultural heritage. Sol-fa syllables (with accompanying hand signs), moveable do, and a system of rhythm duration syllables are features of the method.
children learn easily” (Przygocki 2004, p 44). So what seems logical for adults may not be so for children.

The teachers in Carr’s (2010) study all noted that it was important to find a well-organized method book that they liked, develop their own technique as string players, observe other string teachers for ideas and additional materials, and to “embrace failure” as a means to grow professionally. When teaching specific techniques, several of the teachers indicated the use of a method book to assist in developing that particular skill. Teachers included the use of well-known pedagogical approaches by the likes of Suzuki, Green\textsuperscript{11}, Galamian\textsuperscript{12} and Rolland. It is apparent that participants in Carr’s (2010) study were always looking for new ways to teach and add to their knowledge. They recommended attending professional development opportunities offered by the school district as well as with professional organizations, participation in clinics and the reading of publications focusing on current trends in music education.

Four areas were identified by the participants in Carr’s (2010) study as behavioural and musical traits that the teacher should possess: mastery of instrument, musicianship, patience, and leadership. Participants in the study noted the importance of being proficient on at least one of the bowed instruments, but also being able to demonstrate the desired tone, style, and technique on all four bowed instruments. The ability to model characteristic musicianship qualities is necessary in developing students' basic performance skills. One of the participants in her study commented:

\textsuperscript{11} Elizabeth Green was a distinguished twentieth century American violinist and teacher. She authored a number of books including ‘Teaching Stringed Instruments in Classes’ and ‘Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works’.

\textsuperscript{12} One of the most influential violin teachers of the twentieth century, Ivan Galamian immigrated to the USA between the wars, eventually becoming the head of the violin department at the Julliard School. Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman are amongst his most distinguished students. He authored ‘Principals of Violin Playing and Teaching’ and ‘Contemporary Violin Technique’.
Teachers must be able to actively demonstrate on the instrument. Study your instrument thoroughly. The process by which you develop high level skills on your instrument will give you worlds of insight into the pitfalls and roadblocks your students are experiencing as well as a set of methods to overcome them. If a teacher has good instructional skill but is not musically skilled, the program will suffer. (p.31)

Barnes (2010) notes that experienced teachers rate maintenance of student behaviour as the most important ingredient for successful teaching. First year music teachers (class and instrumental) become aware that student learning is less effective in a less-than-ordered environment. She maintains that veteran teachers must share the responsibility for new teachers thriving, not just surviving.

**Characteristics of successful instrumental music programs**

The first component of successful programs is instructional proficiency, which can be described as having a teaching strategy that produces positive results. According to participants in Carr’s (2010) study, instructional efficiency can be achieved by creating a curriculum, playing all four string instruments well enough to be able to demonstrate on, and having a strategy for approaching proper playing technique. As part of their instruction, string teachers should make sure they include music history, music theory, and history of the instruments in their curricula. Some level of integration between group instrumental classes and mainstream music curriculum would be one way to attend to this. Where this is not possible, aspects of music history and theory may be incorporated into ensemble rehearsals.

In Carr’s (2010) study, different teaching approaches were used by the participants in their programs. Areas the respondents focused on daily were: rhythm, intonation, and internal pulse. Beyond this, some teachers used a method book daily to work on specific techniques; others reserve points in the school year to teach technique. One of the participants noted:
I reserve certain weeks/times to focus only on technique. I may take a week here and there, or a month at the beginning of the year. I frequently use the end of the year to begin larger projects such as tuning and vibrato. I often sneak in a technique week after a big concert or event. It clears the air and can be used to introduce new techniques which will be required for new sets of music. With regards to teaching technique, I sometimes give the class individual practice time while I work quickly with a particular section to introduce or reinforce a technical aspect. In addition, I try to be creative in making up exercises which work for the entire class. This works well for practicing bowing techniques and can be done in the context of a scale". (p. 80)

The implications for this study were to expect divergences in methods and materials used, as well as differences in approaches to teaching and building technique. It was expected that there might be differences in scope between public and private schools, the latter having more autonomy in terms of materials, methods, starting ages, groupings of students and frequency of class contact with students. Variation in the level of formal assessment of students in group string programs was anticipated, as well as the amount of integration with other aspects of school music and performing arts programs.

Teacher-generated string group instructional material

In Sheila Nelson’s Tower Hamlets program, one of the key ingredients to its success is the production of original material designed to cater for both the slower student and the more apt. To cater for the differences, Nelson has produced volumes of her own material which have easy and more difficult parts in the same piece. She notes that the ability to sustain a part tends to occur by the beginning of the third year of instruction. Nelson notes that the music written for the TH Project needs to contain a degree of mixed-ability material, to be performable by groups of mixed (stringed) instruments, and that it needs to be reasonably singable and continuous so that it has a sense of logic for a child practising alone
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at home. Interestingly Nelson does not see the materials she produces as exclusive. “No teacher in the scheme uses only these materials” (Nelson, 1985, p. 80). They are seen as a skeleton providing shared materials for combined events. ‘Stringsongs’ was generated for the purpose of developing reading skills. The pieces can all be sung, and the rounds it contains cater for children reading in unison to begin with, and then gaining independence by playing in parts.

Whilst the pedagogues of international repute, which have been cited, are distinguished by developing unique contributions to the advancement of group string teaching on an international level, the enterprise of the participants in this study proved significant to the collective profile that unfolded.

Retention and attrition of students

The starting age for notable group string programs around the world varies considerably. In the National String Project Consortium group string programs, students generally start in year four or five at school (9-10 year-olds). Colourstrings implements pre-instrumental music training for pre-schoolers. The Suzuki ‘mother-tongue’ approach starts children as three and four year-olds. Although Nelson (1985) personally preferred 6-year-old beginners, she settled on 7-8 year-olds as the starting age that “seemed to provide the most advantages” (p. 72). An important development was “the introduction of a regular second lesson each week in a smaller group” (p. 73). This provided reinforcement to what was happening in the bigger group lesson. The result was greater retention of content from the big group lesson, even though the small group (“back-up”) lesson was very brief. Incorporation of instrumental lessons into the school timetable, and viewing two years of instruction as a suitable initial learning period were other developments which enhance the level of student retention.
Nelson (1985) noted that retention depended in part upon whether or not the lessons were going well, but more importantly upon the support and enthusiasm of the head of school. It was noted also that class teachers “who attend the string lessons, sometimes even learning alongside the children, are an invaluable support.”

Nelson (1985) also became aware of the difficulties in sustaining children’s interest across the transfer from primary to secondary school. She noted that this is due in part to the new environment encountered, but also because of the plethora of new and exciting activities offered.

Some attrition from instrumental music programs is unavoidable, but what are the primary reasons for students discontinuing?

Research data cited has indicated retention may be predicted by student attitudes toward the teacher, by the grade level in which students begin instruction, by cultural factors in some communities, scholastic achievement and music aptitude, by motivational and time factors and by condition of instrument. String teachers who pay attention to these factors and consider ways to ensure that students do not quit because of them may be able to influence students to enroll and remain in their classes (Witt, A., in Barnes, 2003, p.89).

Young students who do not know, or have a negative perception of, the string teacher at the next level, can very easily drop out when changing to the next school. It is important to try to instill a love for string playing in the students, no matter what their level, so that when they do move to another school, they are keen to continue.

Morehouse (1987) found that beginning student attitudes towards the teacher was a significant indicator of retention. Dislike of the teacher was the reason most commonly given for not continuing in instrumental programs according to Dunahoo (1976) in Barnes (2003).
Different studies indicate socio-economic status was a small (McCarthy, 1980) to significant (Klinedinst, 1991) predictor of retention rates. It also had a significant impact on the “regression equation”. Ensley (1988) noted attrition was more a function of transience and scheduling problems, rather than disinterest in the program.

In a study by Martignetti (1965, p. 178) “Loss of interest, resulting from parent indifference,” was cited by teachers of strings, woodwind and brass classes regarding the primary reason for student drop out of instrumental programs. Lack of perseverance, lack of ability, and other activities were found to be less significant. Parents proffered reasons for their children discontinuing, in order of significance, as lack of time to practice, desire to spend time on other activities, and the instrument being too difficult. Students who abandoned instrumental studies cited difficulty of learning an instrument and wanting to spend time on other activities as the major reasons.

Morehouse (1987) noted several significant predictors of beginner retention: the music played, classmates, instrument choice, playing in concerts, and maintaining practice routines. Other factors included expected grade, ownership of instrument, parental support, private lessons, and gender of the student. It was suggested that teachers who were strict and authoritarian had best retention rates.

Students indicated they joined orchestra for the following reasons (in order of rank): to make music, the influence of the teacher, extrinsic activities, musical ability, extrinsic options and family influence. Condition of the instrument was a significant factor in students’ reasons for dropping out in a study by Allen (1981).

Leibowitz (1979) found that high school students who continued had significantly higher musical aptitude scores than those who dropped out. Overall scholastic achievement is a significant predictor of retention (Klinedinst, 1991). Research data indicate the strong
relationship between maths and reading, and retention in instrumental music classes
(Klinedinst, 1991; McCarthy, 1980).
Chapter 3: Research Question

The objective of this study was to undertake a case study of group string teachers with the intention of distilling the data into a collective profile of skills, knowledge and attributes deemed essential to teach stringed instruments in groups, and then to juxtapose this against the mandated Australian professional teaching standards to determine points of alignment and points of discrepancy. Implications of this study may inform the tertiary training of prospective group instrumental teachers, and the mentoring of beginning teachers, so as to effectively equip these teachers for the profession.

The overarching research question is:

What are the collective skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary for group string tuition?

In order to address this question, a series of sub-research questions needs to be considered:

- What are the personal attributes of experienced group string teachers – both innate and learnt?
- What skill set is needed to teach string students in homogenous and heterogeneous groups?
- What knowledge do prospective group string teachers need to acquire to successfully deliver group instrumental teaching programs?
- How do the identified collective skills, knowledge, and attributes relate to the professional standards mandated by the AITSL and the QCT?
Chapter 4: Research Design

This study has arisen as a result of the observed and documented disparity between outcomes of group string teaching programs in Queensland, Australia. The intent has been to generate a collective profile of skills, knowledge and attributes common to group string teachers. A review of the literature indicates a clear set of elements common to the teaching profession at large, and a significant overlap between these elements and those required in group string teaching. Consideration of developments in group string tuition, both nationally and internationally, has served as a backdrop to this investigation at the localised level.

Methodology is the conceptual foundation upon which a study is built. The research methodology is the strategy, or plan of action lying behind the choice of methods for the research (Crotty, 1998). The research methodology explains what has been done, how it has been done and why it has been done in a particular way (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011).

A qualitative study

This study is qualitative, employing a case study design. Qualitative studies are characterised by having thick, rich description (Charmaz, 2006; Geertz, 1973) of the people and events involved. In qualitative studies, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam, 2014). For this project, the qualitative design allowed for the experiences of the participants, and the unfolding pedagogical practice of each, to be documented in a descriptive form.

In defining qualitative research, it may be best to juxtapose it against quantitative research. Quantitative research is typically aligned with investigations where data are quantifiable, that is, they can be collected and collated in a precise, mathematical way. Quantitative studies have typically been seen to be more scientific, repeatable and reliable, with outcomes perceived as more watertight and dependable.
Qualitative research, on the other hand, has been perceived as less reliable and more subjective in approach and outcomes. It is typically built around the observations of the researcher, and therefore has the “human” element more obviously than quantitative investigation. In spite of these perceptions, the qualitative study can be a very reliable methodology for social research. This research study seeks to maintain integrity through precise transcription of interview data, accurate observations, and careful documentary representation of collected artifacts from participants.

This study was conducted with three participants at three school sites in the South East Queensland region of Australia. The study sites were incidental to the research, since the project is about the individuals in the study, not the schools to which each is attached. (See p. 50) In many respects, the teaching contexts of the participants did not have a significant bearing upon the profile of each individual as a group string teacher. Nevertheless, it became evident that the school culture did have some impact upon the nature and degree of success of the group string programs run by the participants. Furthermore, the difference between private and public school contexts affects somewhat the scope of the programs run by each of the participants.

Two of the participants work at well-established private schools. Ann works at an all-boys school, where the intake is from year five (ten-year-olds) upwards. Yoshi works in an all-girls school where the enrolments are from preschool to year twelve. The third participant, Oliver, is an itinerant group strings teacher working across a number of Education Queensland schools. Interaction with Oliver, for the purpose of this study, occurred at one of the schools on his circuit. Data were collected via interviews, observations and perusal of artifacts over an eight month period, from the latter part of 2013 through middle 2014.
A case study

This research is designed as a case study. A case study is an in-depth, multi-faceted investigation, using qualitative methods, designed to create a detailed profile of the case being studied (Liamputtong, 2009). This case study relied on the use of multiple data sources for breadth and integrity. The case study itself becomes both the means of inquiry and the product of that inquiry (Stake, 2000).

The intention of this research was to gain in-depth knowledge of a few individual examples rather than scant knowledge about a larger number of samples, the idea being to gain an understanding of the whole by focusing on a key part (Gerring, 2007). In this study, three group string teachers were selected because it was anticipated that the focused and defined list of skills, knowledge and attributes generated would be sufficient for a viable collective profile.

This case study is examined through a “bounded system” (Creswell, 2007), where certain boundaries have placed limits on data collection (Liamputtong, 2009). The boundaries for this study included geographical limitations because of travel restraints. There was no initial intention to limit participants to primary or secondary schooling contexts, however it so happened that all three subjects are currently involved in those contexts. Since the study is about the participants themselves, the boundaries of the research are essentially to do with the participants and their experiences, rather than the contexts in which they teach.

In a sense, this project could firstly be described as an “instrumental case study”, where the case is of secondary interest. Each case plays a supportive role and thereby facilitates the understanding of something else (Liamputtong, 2009). The individual participant profiles are the means for collating a collective profile of skills, knowledge and
attributes common to group string teachers. Whilst the individual profiles are significant in themselves, they primarily serve in contributing to the composite profile.

In the second instance, the study might better be described as a “collective case study”. A collective case study may be defined as an instrumental case study extended to several cases (Stake, 2000). Whilst each case has specific features, happenings, relationships and situations, one outcome of a collective case study is the ability to lead to generalisations.

Each case will yield some things atypical to the collective outcome; yet will contribute to the understanding of the whole. The aim of replication through a collective case study is to generate a rich framework upon which theoretical generalisations can be based (Yin, 2009). The intent of this project, then, is to create a collective profile which is transferable and from which generalisations can be made and broader implications drawn.

In this collective case study, the process began with a research question to address the research problem, moved towards a research design, and then proceeded towards the selection of participants and methods of data collection. As data were being collected, the process of analysis began, culminating in the generation of individual case study reports (Yin, 2009). Cross-case analysis followed, and the drafting of a collective profile of skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers was forthcoming. In the compilation of the collective profile, similarities, differences and anomalies were all taken into account in producing a final distillation. Beyond this, the collective profile was placed against the professional competencies mandated for Australian teachers in a bid to ascertain points of alignment, and points of variance, and to determine “gaps” and tensions or omissions.

**Paradigm**

The paradigm for this study is constructivist. Constructivism approaches reality as being in a continual state of construction and reconstruction (Bryman, 2004). Rather than
reality existing as an independent entity to be discovered (positivism), people participate in the construction of social reality. One advantage of a constructivist approach is that it allows greater flexibility than the positivist model (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 368). In this research, flexibility was apparent, for example, in the approach taken with semi-structured interviews. Whilst a series of questions was planned, exploring interesting twists and turns in the unfolding stories of each participant was readily accommodated. In this study, the constructivist paradigm played out as the participants were encouraged to tell their story, and share their perspectives. This enabled construction of individual profiles, and from there, the construction of a composite profile.

**Methods and data collection**

Diversity of perception is essential to qualitative research. Case study research necessitates “integrated holistic comprehension of the case” Liamputtong (2009). Interviews were fundamental to data collection in this study. In the interviews undertaken, the intent was to be aware of not only the words spoken, but also the verbal emphasis, body language and gestural cues, which add dimension to, and amplification of the meaning of spoken content. Silverman (2000) notes that interviews are typically a major source of data collection for research; interviews are the predominant source in this study.

Observation is the foundation of all research methods (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). Classroom observations, and the gathering of documentation, offer other means of data generation in school-based research apart from interviews (Silverman, 2000). This qualitative investigation involved semi-formal interviews, in situ lesson observations, artifact perusal (including materials like lesson plans, instructional materials/method books, secondary resource material), and observation of ensemble rehearsals and public performances.
As means of data collection in this study, the review of documents and resources used by the participants contributed in a supplementary way to interviews and observations undertaken. Silverman (2000) notes that we cannot learn through records alone how an organisation actually operates from day to day. Rather, they supply the researcher with another aspect to the total research package.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods of data collection in the study of a social phenomenon (Bryman 2004). An early reference to triangulation was proposed by Webb, et al. (1966), who suggested, “Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced” (p.3). Triangulation is a typical aspect of case study methodology. It gives multiple perspectives or views on a case. In this study, interviews, observations, and perusal of artifacts are the three points of the triangle. Each has served to verify the other, add a broader dimension to the body of data collected, and enhance the validity of the conclusions drawn.

The aim was to collect detailed data from the three study participants on matters such as: evidence of sound planning and sequencing of programs; the sequencing and application of the lesson content in the class setting; the management of classes and whole programs; the personality of the teacher and the dynamic of the interaction with students; the transference of concepts and skills; performance outcomes measured in part by individual skill levels attained and ensemble performance capabilities; and management of the challenges and constraints of the workplaces in which each practitioner operates. It was anticipated that the gathering of this data through semi-structured interviews, observation of teaching outcomes (through attendance of ensemble rehearsals and public performances by participant-directed ensembles), and perusal of artifacts (global group string-teaching programs, specific lesson plans, tutor materials used) would provide the researcher with data enough to distil a collective profile. Written notes of public ensemble performances were taken, noting features
like teacher/student dynamics, teacher management skills, performance level (commensurate with student skill levels and repertoire choice), and interface with other parties like parents and other support staff. A schedule of interviews and observations is located in Appendix A.

Interviews formed the mainstay of the data-collection process. Silverman (2000) aptly notes “talk organizes the world” (p. 821). As a “methodology for listening,” the central concern of this case study is with “seeing the world from the perspective of our subjects” (p. 824). Interviews were used with the aim of eliciting the greatest depth and breadth possible in the accounts of each participant – to allow the interviewees to share their perspectives, their stories (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011).

Observations of group string classes, ensemble rehearsals and performances, in some respects served to complement and qualify comments made during the interviews. These in situ observational experiences amplified and added perspective to remarks made in the two-way dialogue of the interviews.

The artifact collection process was most eminently served by the collection of self-authored string class teaching materials from all three participants. These materials worked particularly well to underscore the perspectives gleaned during the interviews. Memos drafted by the participants for parents and caregivers of students in the programs served a peripheral role, since not all of these were specific only to the group string programs – some had a broader application to the general instrumental programs in the schools in which the participants teach.

The aim of the data collection phase of this research was to collect background information about the participants, and compile descriptions of their views and actions (Charmaz, 2006) regarding the group string teaching and learning process, to be able to substantiate themes drawn and conclusions made. The aim was, furthermore, to gather data to
reveal changes over time. This latter aim was achieved with two of the participants by spacing each of their interview-observation packages approximately six months apart.

**Research instruments**

Interview questions were informed by the studies reviewed in the literature as the basis from which semi-structured interviews could take place. This led to further dialogic interaction between the researcher and participants, crystallising into the schedule of questions shown in Appendix G.

Observations of group string lessons, ensemble rehearsals and concert performances were recorded as hand-written notes. The nature of these records was anecdotal, in large measure simply recording the activities undertaken, and the time-frame in which these occurred. As noted earlier in the study, no records were taken with a view to evaluating the teachers themselves, or appraising the programs at the schools in which they teach.

As regards artifacts collected, the participants readily supplied the researcher with copies of the teaching resources they had generated, as well as hard copies of written communication, which form the administrative arm of their programs.

**The interview process**

Semi-structured interviews in this study were designed to have a number of questions prepared in advance, but prepared in such a way as to be sufficiently open to allow the careful improvising of subsequent questions (Wengraf, 2001). Each interview was approached as an “inter-view” (to view between) where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee (Liamputtong, 2009). The aim of the interviews was to elicit rich information from the perspective of each of the participants so as to build the individual group-string-teacher profiles. Beyond that, participant interviews were the critical component in compiling the collective profile.
Whilst questions directed towards collective processes may be good to conduct before questions about individual practice (Charmaz, 2006), in this study the focus was initially on building individual profiles, before seeking to consolidate a collective one. As a result, the interviews moved quickly to frame up individual experience.

In the interviews undertaken, questions were asked in two broad ways – thematically to generate knowledge, and dynamically to enhance interpersonal relationships in the interview (Liamputtong, 2009). Questions began with the aim of eliciting the broader issues relating to the participants’ group-string-teaching practice, things like undergraduate training and professional development, mentors, motivation, and biographical information. What childhood experiences did each of the participants have in relation to their development as string players? What was their tertiary experience like? How did their lives unfold such that they became specialist string teachers? It seemed useful for participants in this study to tell their story of how each became involved in specialist string teaching as a profession. What people have particularly influenced them in their approach? What studied methods from earlier years do they still use? What professional development experiences enhanced their professional growth? What changes in their teaching approach have occurred since starting group string teaching? What “wow” moments had they experienced? A “wow” moment, or epiphany, in this research, was viewed as an event that leaves an indelible mark on a person (Denzin, 1989). The researcher was eager to ascertain any incidents or events that shaped, or re-shaped, the way in which participants undertake their approach to group string teaching.

Once big-picture issues had been explored, questions concerning the details of things like the teaching of specific techniques, for example, bowing, were raised. The duration of some interviews was dependent upon the length of the school lunch break. Interviews, which had no externally imposed time restrictions, seemed to come to a natural conclusion.
Interviews were conducted twice with two of the participants, and once with the third participant. The participants who were interviewed twice had their interviews approximately six months apart; the other participant had a single extended interview. Observation of classes occurred on the same days as the interviews with the first two participants. Spacing the observations six months apart meant that the developmental nature of the programs could be observed, to some degree.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are important, not only for protecting the interests of the participants in a research project, but also as an integral part of the whole research process (Maxwell, 2013). Participation in this research was on the basis of informed consent (Christians, 2000). Subjects in the project [Ethics protocol number: QCM/17/13/HREC] consented voluntarily, and were given a full and open disclosure of all facets of the research and their involvement in it. [A copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent can be found in Appendices B and C.] Privacy and confidentiality (Christians, 2000) have been maintained with the use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. Non-disclosure of the research locations was another aspect of the ethical considerations of the study. Since interviews and observations were conducted within school compounds, the principals of each of the schools also gave informed consent for the fieldwork to be conducted on school premises. [A copy of the Principal Information Sheet and the Principal Consent are located in Appendices D and E.] Whilst the research was entirely to do with the participants involved, a Third Party Information Sheet was made available to students in classes and ensembles being observed, prior to the observation dates [Appendix F].

It was important that participants gave a fully informed consent to participate in this study (Gibbs, 2007). This entailed knowing exactly the nature of the study, plans for the
disposal of data at the conclusion of the study, having the option to withdraw at any time, and protection of participants’ identities.

Prior to the initial interviews being conducted, the participants were given a written explanation of the project, its purpose and the expected outcomes. Included in the correspondence was a formal invitation to participate, with detailed ethical commitments given on the part of the researcher. Once interviews were recorded and then transcribed, participants were invited to review the transcripts of the interviews for verification.

**Limitation, validation and bias**

The intention of this research was to generate findings that are not limited to the specific group of participants being studied (Bryman, 2004). The goal was to make the participant sample representative so that findings could be generalised beyond the confines of this study.

Perhaps one limitation of the research is the small sample of participants. Because the teaching approaches represented by the three participants will not reflect the whole gamut of approaches used to successfully run group string teaching programs, there may be some limitations to generalising the findings on a broader scale. The geographic constraints of data collection for this research project means that, while the findings may be highly applicable in Queensland (where essentially all students in state government schools have access to free group instrumental tuition), it cannot necessarily be assumed that they can be related nationally or globally.

Internal validity concerns the match between observations and theoretical ideas developed; external validity is focused on the generalisation of findings across different settings (Bryman 2004). To achieve internal validity in this project, the researcher completed verbatim transcripts of all interviews, wrote up observations of each in situ experience, and
took into consideration teaching materials and other artifact evidence to generate individual profiles for each participant. Each of these individual profiles was then compared and contrasted in a bid to achieve some sort of external validity.

In this study, internal validity has been monitored via a number of means. Verbatim transcriptions of interviews were the starting point. In terms of data presentation, much of the content is in the form of direct quotes from the participants, with the aim of not only maintaining the “human” element of the discourse, but also allowing the data to speak for itself. The intention was to make observations of classes, ensemble rehearsals and performances from the viewpoint of the “disinterested observer”. The aim has been to present descriptive accounts of what was observed without in any way critiquing the participants themselves, or the outcomes of their classes, ensemble rehearsals and performances.

The description of the content of self-authored tutor books and other artifacts considered in this study seeks to add breadth to the profiles generated through interviews and in situ observations. To enhance the internal validity of findings, the researcher has sought to engage the participants in “respondent validation” by providing the participants with verbatim transcripts of all interviews. This so-called “member checking” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) is an aspect of research technique that is critical to establishing validity in a study such as this. It seeks to ensure that what has been recorded represents that divulged by the participants. Member checking occurred during the course of data collection and was both informal and formal. The informal dimension amounted to obtaining verbal clarification on points of misunderstanding during interviews, as well as verbal commentary from the participants on in situ class and ensemble observations. Verbatim transcripts of each interview were forwarded to the respective participants. Two of the three interviewees responded with minor corrections and clarifications of the transcripts. None of these clarifications had any bearing on the outcome or findings of the research.
Bias in research can be likened to declaring excess baggage at the airport (Richards, 2009). Since a researcher brings to a study as set of preconceptions and perspectives, it is important that these be given due consideration at the outset of the study, during it, and at the end of the research (Janesick, 2000). Bias can cause a researcher to overlook certain things both in the field work and the analysis phases. Similarly, undue attention may be directed towards features of the research that align with preconceptions. Bias is an inevitable part of any account (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000), so the issue for the researcher is more one of being aware of biases and what interests are being served by those biases.

To this study the researcher brings an extensive background in teaching, including group string teaching. The researcher’s own skills, knowledge and attributes as a music educator, and more specifically as a group instrumental teacher, needed to be consciously set aside so as to allow the voices of the participants to speak unhindered. Pre-conceptions as to the outcome of the research needed to be jettisoned, namely any anticipated overlaps or divergences in the collective profile of the group string teachers under examination.

Thompson (1984) comments:

Once we begin to develop an enthusiasm for a certain approach to the teaching of our subject, as every active teacher does, it becomes rather too easy to dismiss other valid approaches as worthless and not to bother to look at them critically and impartially. There is a tendency to see what we want to see instead of what is actually there. (p 163)

The object, then, for the researcher, is to acknowledge the potential of bias and to build in checks and balances on the journey from analysis to conclusion. Checks and balances in this research included referencing back to participants for points of clarification on data
collected, documenting both anticipated and unexpected findings emerging from the data analysis, and keeping the findings of other related studies in view.

**Case study participants**

In a collective case study, participants need to be carefully selected so that common (as well as distinctive) features in their skills, knowledge and attributes may be ascertained (Yin, 2009). Purposive sampling (Merriam, 2014) and snowball sampling (Bryman, 2004) were both used to select the participants for this study. The purposive dimension to the selection process meant that participants interviewed and observed were relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2004). The snowballing aspect to participant selection was used as a means of locating other potential candidates for the research.

The preliminary selection criteria for qualifying participants included significant experience as a group string teacher, and evidence of a thriving program ascertained through well-managed programs, student numbers involved, and quality of output (Carr, 2010; Stronge, 2002).

In determining the cohort to be included, group string teachers were initially canvassed through advertisements in publications from the Australian Strings Association. After interaction with nine potential participants, the project was confined to a sample of three group string teachers, each assigned a pseudonym (Oliver, Ann, Yoshi). Geographic constraints played a part in the choice of participants from the pool. Ready access by motor vehicle to the teaching arenas of the selected practitioners was an essential consideration.

The study population for this research comprises mid-career string teachers. The preliminary selection criteria for the participant population are significant to the project, because the intent of the research is to provide a collective profile of essential characteristics for group string teachers. Mid-career teachers offer a depth and breadth of experience over
an extended period time which lends itself towards more comprehensive teacher profiles (Stronge, 2002). Young teachers with a lack of experience may mean limited capacity to supply material of suitable depth for this study.

**Data analysis and coding**

Data collected from interviews, observations and artifact perusal, were sifted through and a thematic analysis was undertaken to indentify key themes or recurring emergent patterns (Yap, 2013), as well as to encompass divergent aspects in the group string teaching dynamic of each of the participants.

Verbatim transcriptions of all interviews were prepared for the data analysis phase of the research. Hand-written notes, taken during observations of group lessons, ensemble rehearsals, and ensemble performances, were similarly transcribed. Artifacts were scrutinised in a bid to shed further light on the profile of each participant.

A key mindset in this research was to see things through the eyes of participants (Gibbs, 2007). Gibbs (2007) notes that it is unrealistic to think qualitative researchers can completely remove prior frameworks, even though some writers reject a priori theoretical undergirding. Interpretation of data needs to faithfully represent the participants, contexts and settings as well as provide information and explanation to the readers of the research.

As Denzin (2004) notes, writing that powerfully reinscribes and re-creates experience, invests itself with its own power and authority. Notwithstanding, the endeavour was to avoid “going native” – the interviewer just accepting the participant’s worldview rather than reflecting on it (Gibbs, 2007). Even in the face of this potential pitfall, representing the voices of the participants has been a primary concern.

A significant point to note is that transcription of interviews is a change of medium and introduces issues of accuracy, fidelity and interpretation. Most transcriptions record
words only and miss out on body language, inference, context, setting, dynamic, etc. A good transcript is concerned with faithfully capturing the sense of the interview (Gibbs, 2007). In this research, where transcriptions have been quoted verbatim within the body of the text, underlining has indicated words emphasised by the participants, whilst the bracketed words “emphasis added” are inserted into the text where the emphasis is added by the researcher.

Reflexivity, as a term, accepts that the researcher has a role in the construction of knowledge and recognizes that qualitative research involves interpretation (Gibbs, 2007). As such, the researcher needs to be reflective about the implications of his/her methods, values, biases, and decisions. As a reflexive report, this study endeavours to engender credibility by remaining true to the data collected and interpreted. The aim was to achieve this by the inclusion of many quotations from interviews, accuracy in field observations, and maintaining faithfulness in reporting on artifacts gathered and the content and context of documentation perused.

Codes in this research project are a combination of inductive and deductive (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). Inductive codes are defined as those codes that are derived from material raised by the participants themselves. Deductive codes come from topics initiated by the interviewer, or sourced from literature and theory.

A code is generally a word or short phrase that captures the essence, summarises or condenses data into an evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2008). Fit and relevance are necessary criteria to be fulfilled by coding. Coding forces the researcher to think about the material in ways that differ from the participants’ interpretations – like viewing a familiar landscape with fresh eyes (Charmaz, 2006). In the undergirding of this project the intent was to maintain a fit between the research question, the
sort of data needed to answer the question, and the methods used to collect the data and generate the outcome (Richards, 2009).

Thematic coding was applied in this research. With thematic coding, the researcher effectively develops labels by which sections of data can be recognised. Essentially, data have been sorted into categories. The broad reading of data moves towards discovering patterns and developing themes.

In this research, comparison of data from earlier and later interviews and observations helped in finding and augmenting unfolding themes and patterns. On the second and subsequent readings of data gathered, more themes became evident than were first noted. The result of this was that not only were the individual profiles given more substance, but also the collective profile became broader in its scope.
Chapter 5: Results

The nature and scope of interviews and observations

Data were collected over an eight month period. With ethics approval having been gained on 13 September 2013 (QCM/17/13/HREC), the first series of interviews and observations began later that year.

The first observation with Yoshi was of a heterogeneous year two string class with seventeen students [about one third of the class was away that day] on 25 October 2013. The participant directed the class from the front, with a lower strings specialist assisting, as well as a Graduate Diploma of Education music student and the classroom teacher in attendance. Following the observation lesson, a forty minute interview was conducted. A subsequent follow-up observation and shorter 20 minute interview were completed on 16 May 2014. The lesson observation was of a heterogeneous year two string class with 35 students. The participant directed the class whilst the lower strings specialist assisted. Two classroom teachers were in attendance. Concert performances were not observed with this participant.

Oliver was first interviewed and observed teaching on 7 November 2013. A series of three heterogeneous first year string classes was observed followed by a year four and a year seven class, then a composite year five/six class. Each class had between four and six students. A 35 minute interview was conducted during the lunch break. The second observation occurred on 13 March 2014 and involved Oliver teaching two year-three classes for 45 minutes each. Again, the classes were heterogeneous, the first having 10 students and the second six. The follow-up interview, again in the lunch break, lasted for 25 minutes. A brief phone interview of seven-eight minutes on 23 March 2014 completed this aspect of data collection. Concert performances involving this participant, specific to this research project, were not observed.
The only interview with Ann was an extended one on 1 May 2014, lasting for over an hour. Prior to that, on 18 March 2014, she was observed teaching in an all-day instrumental music workshop program. This involved teaching small homogenous groups of up to eight year-five boys in the morning, culminating in a heterogeneous group of 43 students in the afternoon. The participant managed this large group session from the front, with the assistance of a lower strings specialist attending to the cellos and basses.

A second observation was conducted on 1 April 2014. The first class observed was a 35 minute lesson with a homogenous group of seven year-five boys learning violin; the next lesson, of the same length and content, was of four year-five boys.

The final observation of students in Ann’s first year program involved the hour-long, weekly heterogeneous ensemble rehearsal on 27 May 2014 [39 students with the research participant directing the rehearsal, and lower strings specialist assisting], in preparation for an end-of-semester concert the following week.

The researcher observed the intermediate strings, senior strings, and the senior chamber strings performing in their end-of-semester concert on the evening of 27 May 2014. These groups represented a visible expression of the intermediate and advanced level outcomes of the whole string program under Ann’s jurisdiction. Both the intermediate and senior string ensembles were conducted on stage by the participant, whilst the senior chamber strings, directed by Ann, ran as a self-sufficient, autonomous ensemble, performing at intermission, independent of the director.

Data distillation

For each participant, a brief biographical sketch of events leading to the participant’s current engagement with group string teaching is given. Observations of lessons, ensemble rehearsals and concerts, key points gleaned from interviews with the participants, and
significant aspects of artifacts [participant-authored teaching materials, letters to parents and caregivers, and promotional materials for the program] are considered. A profile for each of the participants is then established.

Following the drafting of individual participant profiles, a composite profile of skills, knowledge and attributes is collated, noting similarities and differences. The composite profile is then compared with the professional standards for teaching mandated by AITSL and the QTC. From there, aspects of correlation, as well as gaps in the interface between the composite profile and professional competencies, are considered. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

Observations of lessons were conducted with a view to ascertaining numerous facets of the participants’ teaching approaches. The researcher’s observation schedule is shown in Appendix H.

**Oliver: Participant 1**

Oliver has worked as a strings specialist for over twenty years. The Scandinavian Colourstrings method has had a major influence on his approach to string teaching, to the point where he has authored a group string teaching method for the Queensland scenario, based upon the Finnish model.

Oliver’s training on violin at primary and secondary school was solely through the group string teaching program offered by Education Queensland\(^\text{13}\). He learnt from the same teacher for the full duration of his schooling. The incredible consistency of his teacher left an indelible mark on him. Oliver explains, “My teacher...who taught me all the way through

\(^{13}\) The Queensland Instrumental Music Program is a comprehensive tuition program in which students learn orchestra or band instruments through instruction on a group basis (between 3 and 10 students). Students in the Instrumental Music Program have at least two contact periods per week, on in an instrumental lesson and at least one in an ensemble rehearsal. Retrieved from http://ppr.det.qld.gov.au/education/management/Pages/Instrumental-Music-Program.aspx
school... [one of the] things I feel I’ve got from her... [is] just the incredible consistency and reliability as a teacher in just always turning up and being there – that side too, which is very important – undervalued sometimes.” These attributes of consistency and reliability have been not only a feature of his own teaching, but also a commitment to the advancement of quality string playing and teaching in South East Queensland.

After graduating from tertiary music training, where he majored in violin, he worked in professional orchestras for one and a half years, and then turned his attention towards string teaching as a career. It was at that time, a little over twenty years ago, that he spent a year teaching in a village school in Finland, in a town “where music was very, very strong, where a high percentage of people played an instrument.” But it was the sense of community which left the greatest impact upon the young string teacher. He returned to Brisbane and set up a regional string orchestra program, which was his version of the community music-making he had experienced overseas. He has maintained his commitment to this regional string ensemble program ever since.

A return visit to Finland, some fifteen years after his first, to complete a course on Colourstrings, with Szilvay, cemented his approach to string teaching. “I think there...the lights went on.” Following this experience, Oliver returned to Brisbane intent on applying what he had learnt to the local situation. The result was a tutor method suitable for group string teaching in Queensland schools.

The first participant observation for this study was late in the year. As a result, the first year students in the program had completed the initial technique-building phase. The classes observed during this visit had between four and six students. Being a program fashioned with an underlying foundation of Colourstrings principles, there was a mix of standard pieces [for example, “Hot cross buns”, “Mary had a little lamb”] as well as
technique-building pieces that Oliver has devised for his own method book. These pieces use half-way harmonics and shifts back to stopped notes. Students were actively engaged in problem solving during the lesson. This was particularly apparent when students in the group were, at one point in the lesson, asked to help correct the intonation of another class member.

The teacher circulated around the room occasionally, correcting postural and technique issues. Hands-on help was part of the teaching strategy, exemplified by the participant physically assisting one student with the correction of the hand shape on a cello bow. Oliver had pre-recorded his own piano accompaniments, so that whilst the recorded accompaniments were being played, he was free to move around the room correcting the children’s technique. It is noteworthy that classes had a fairly strong technique-building base undergirding the lessons. This was evidenced, in part, by Oliver’s mobility around the room, using a hands-on approach to assist students with the building of their technique. The priority of establishing good technical foundations is further substantiated by the content of his tutor method, particularly with its accent on training correct left-hand shape and posture, and movement around the fingerboard.

The second observation with Oliver occurred early in the following school year with beginner year three classes. One group had ten students whilst the other had six. Left-hand pizzicato [using all four fingers] was the priority in the lessons. I was later advised that the bulk of the term was built upon left-hand pizzicato. The pre-recorded piano backing allowed the teacher to walk around and monitor the students. Urging the children to read the music was a significant aspect of the lessons. The teacher explained how to practise – small sections at a time, not necessarily from the beginning.

Music reading homework sheets are contained in the self-authored method book, designed to promote familiarity with notation and student music-reading ability. The bow is
introduced. Parts of the bow are named and the teacher explains to the students the importance of looking after the bow and how to care for it. The participant appeared to display a gentle manner with the children, who seemed quite engaged throughout the lesson.

Considering Oliver’s significant extrapolation of the Colourstrings method into his own approach, it was expected that interviews would reveal the impact of Szilvay’s method upon his own teaching process. Interviews began with a look at the early years of his music training, progressing to the unfolding of his teaching career, and significant aspects on that journey.

Oliver shared about his tertiary training, and then moved to an exploration of the forces that have shaped him as a group string specialist. He felt it was not a bad thing for conservatorium students to be preoccupied with learning instrumental skills at the expense of teaching skills. His notion is that a strong background in instrumental performance, and the necessary skill acquisition required for playing at a high level, set prospective teachers up with a broader base of knowledge.

Oliver commented, “In the university days we had a subject which was called ‘Studio Teaching Methods’….It was in third year, possibly fourth year as well, for one hour a week... and it was a bit of a hodge-podge of a course. It wasn't incredibly well structured, pretty haphazard in what was presented and what was covered and...I don’t think it was incredibly useful. But at that time I think most students are not thinking about training to be teachers, so it wasn’t particularly high on anyone’s agenda anyway....We watched those Rolland films. I don’t know that we did much on Suzuki – possibly a little bit. Certainly I don’t have any recollection of covering anything like the Colourstrings, which, by then would have already been quite a well-known program. And then [we] probably just had a bit of informal discussion on how to teach certain things...maybe how to teach a certain bow stroke, or what
you do in your first lesson....I don’t remember much talk about the AMEB [Australian Music Examinations Board]...but really, it just wasn’t structured for a whole course, for a whole year-type-thing, where you would cover things quite systematically from the beginning.”

Considering his limited training in string pedagogy during his tertiary years, Oliver’s reflections about his early teaching experiences are understandable: “I didn’t have any idea about teaching myself, and I was just doing some lessons basically based on what I knew, which was nothing about teaching.” On his first trip to Finland he used material like Mazas and Kreutzer studies, as well as quite a bit of Suzuki repertoire. “They do a bit of Suzuki in Finland – it’s probably more popular [there] than here [in Australia].”

Oliver commented that he “did his own thing” as a teacher for quite a few years, then felt the need for some professional development, broadening, and fresh ideas. “I did a lot with AUSTA [Australian Strings Association], probably in the last seven or eight years, and I think that has been really good....In some ways it was fairly similar to what I did from the word ‘go’, but in terms of material, obviously you know a lot more about what's available – you try to use better material – and I think developing my own material, that has been the biggest change in what I do in lessons.”

During his second visit to Finland, Oliver enrolled in a course on Colourstrings with the Szilvays [violinist Geza, and cellist brother Csaba] in Helsinki. Not really knowing much about the Colourstrings, Oliver reflects, “I wanted to go and find out exactly what it was all about and what it entailed, and I think there, kind of, ‘the lights went on.’” Oliver stopped

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14 Mazas was a notable French violinist from the early nineteenth century who is most remembered for the violin studies and duets which he wrote.
15 Kreutzer is best known for his 42 etudes for violin, as well as having Beethoven’s so-called “Kreutzer” Sonata for violin and piano dedicated to him.
16 The Australian Strings Association is a professional body of players, teachers, and makers of bowed stringed instruments. The association conducts conferences and workshops, and promotes goods and services for string players across Australia.
short of describing Geza Szilvay as a mentor. “I saw him in action...but he was more someone I watched from a distance – a bit remote to be a mentor as such.”

After that second Scandinavian experience, Oliver comments, “I think that just the Colourstrings, the concepts they have based their teaching on make a lot of sense – well to me they did, then the idea was to come here [Australia] and see how [I] could incorporate some of those ideas into my own teaching in my own context, so that’s what I’ve probably been doing for the last five years. I think developing my own material - that has [been] the biggest change in what I do in the lessons.”

Oliver has spent several years trialing drafts of his beginner tutor. With its roots strongly grounded in the Colourstrings ideology and approach, the underlying mindset is that “slow and steady wins the race” – proper foundational technique pays off in the long run. Oliver recounts, upon completing the teacher-training course in Colourstrings in Finland in 2008, that he became acutely aware of “what you could do by using things like left hand pizzicato, numbered left hand pizzicato and harmonics, with kids right from the very first lesson...and how that can really help with the set-up of the instrument and general dexterity of the fingers and movements on the instruments too, in terms of left hand movement, shifting right from a very early age, the idea then being that those things don’t then become a huge trauma to get through later on.”

As a heterogeneous group string teaching method, beginning with a substantial amount of left hand pizzicato on open strings, the composer cleverly synthesizes the use of violin and double bass E string with cello and viola C by couching piano accompaniments in C major and A minor, thereby simultaneously accommodating the divergent strings. With the introduction of the bows comes the immediate use of the harmonic at the halfway point of each string. The combination of bowed notes with left hand pizzicato [sometimes
simultaneously on different strings] leads from the exclusive use of crotchets to the introduction of quavers. Diamond harmonics [at the quarter and third point on the string] are used to introduce the positions for left-hand fingered notes. Stopped notes are then introduced by matching the halfway harmonic and the first-position stopped note on the string above [with the exception of the double bass]. All of this preparation is designed not only to prepare for correct intonation of the stopped notes, but also to train the left-hand shape, with the aim of avoiding the typically collapsed left wrist, which is endemic amongst young string players. The other fingers are then introduced, along with the use of minims.

As a first year tutor designed for heterogeneous group tuition, Oliver’s product is a thoroughly considered and effectively constructed text that combines the best of Colourstrings principles with the realities of teaching in the Australian school setting. The keyboard backing provides a useful musical accompaniment for the product. Oliver notes, “I use the keyboard in the lessons because you can turn anything into something that sounds like music, I think, if you use the keyboard....I’ve had some nice reactions [to the keyboard accompaniments for the pieces in the tutor book]. [One] really smart girl, really bright – you listen to her speak – it’s like an adult – ‘cause she came for the first time two weeks ago and I didn’t really know where she was at, so she came with the beginners and she just made this little remark, when she heard it with the keyboard, the little plucking [piece], said, ‘That’s really quite lovely’ – made a remark to that effect, so she heard straight away the music in it. That’s the thing. Without it [the keyboard accompaniments], it doesn’t sound like much.”

Oliver’s priority on steadily building the students’ technical foundation was observable in his classes. He comments, “There’s a tendency to try and get hot-shot teachers in to do something quickly, but sometimes I think the long-term, steady approach is better in some ways in the end…. [The] slow approach...does help set it [the technique] up [for] down the track, and that’s kind-of-like the whole philosophy, that, if you want them playing well in
high school, the ground work has to be done so carefully. And I think that a lot of people
don’t get it. They’re in a hurry to get the kids playing so many notes, but there’s no
technique. You know, they might be playing a lot of notes but it’s just – they’re not going to
get much better, because there’s nothing there to back it up, there’s no technique to take it
further."

Oliver introduces the bow towards the end of the first term, having focused on left
hand pizzicato until that point. He sets the beginner bow grip at the balance point of the bow.
“There’s so much weight [to hold the bow up] and tightness straight away... gripping and
tightness – so here [part way along the bow from the frog] they’re a lot more relaxed.
They’re still not always perfect [bow holds] but they’re OK in general....They’ve got enough
finger [strength, dexterity], especially if you move it up a bit, it’s much lighter so they can
manage it there pretty well straight away. That’s been the philosophy on the bow.”

In terms of management of the bow hand in the playing action, Oliver comments, “If
the groups were smaller, or you were doing it one-on-one, you’d consider doing the Szilvay
thing where they do the air-bowing...but he’s physically there with the kid, like he’s hands-on
[physically assisting the child to “air bow” by standing behind the child and moving the
child’s forearm out and in] while they [the children] were doing [sic] the left hand plucking –
so they’re feeling the movement, and that would be good to do, but in a group of eight or
nine, [that’s] very hard work, with time factors and that involved.”

For using the left hand fingers to stop the strings, Oliver waits “pretty much” till term
three. “Part of me would like to get them going earlier but it’s just the way it works out, with
the time and interruptions and all that stuff that goes on.”

In terms of migrating the left hand down from the half-way harmonic position, Oliver
says, “I start with playing the octave harmonic on G then I take the hand back to play the
matching G, third finger on D string [violin]...the theory that they’re hearing the harmonic, then matching the tone....I don’t think it’s too bad. Part of me would like to start with the F♯, because of the hand balance and what not....I mean I tend to think there’s lots of good reasons to do that but just in the way I do the half-way harmonics and all this before they even play any stopped notes, it kind-of works with the material, and the other thing too, is that I think a lot of teachers around now, at least in Brisbane anyway, like to start with that...third [finger]....I’m not fully convinced it’s necessarily the best way; I don’t know, because they can sort of lock down a bit when they do that, but anyway for me it’s really the movement down, bringing the hand back, because up in the harmonic position, they can’t do any of this [demonstrates collapsed left wrist]. So the idea then is trying to get them to – it’s a real nice theory ...kids are kids, you know. The kids still manage to go there [collapsed wrist], some of them, but I reckon overall, since I’ve started using this stuff, the overall set-ups definitely look better, as I sort of look at the kids in the ensembles....I think it helps.”

Oliver seeks to explain to the parents “a little bit about what [they] are actually doing, why the kids are only using left-hand pizzicato for term one....At concerts I’ll usually give a little spiel to the parents about what they’re doing and why this sounds like it does, or why we’re not using the bow, or why we’re only bowing open strings and harmonics. So I do try and give them a bit of a clue and I do stress that it’s a bit of a ‘slowly, slowly’ approach But we do do some of the basic tunes like ‘Mary had a little lamb’ and ‘Hot cross buns’ anyway, and I don’t know that we do them a whole lot later than if I was teaching out of any other book – possibly a little bit later, because I’m trying to set them up for that, but I think a lot of the stuff [the tutor-specific exercises] in the American books is not known anyway”.

Oliver’s greatest frustration with parents comes with the issue of purchasing instruments. He “gives the parents advice and then they don’t follow it.” He explains, “I’ve sort of developed a strategy with [this] over the years. At one point in time I just said what
size to get, maybe gave them an idea of where to go but, with this advent of internet purchases, so many kids started turning up with really terrible instruments, that I’ve had to be a lot stricter about guidelines of what to buy, so I’ve written a pretty comprehensive note which I usually give out to the kids when I send them off to get something, basically listing three or four shops that I’d recommend…but I’ve found that note has been quite useful. I’m basically stressing that they have to get an instrument that’s been set up professionally, and I just explain that doesn’t happen at the local shops. And the success rate has improved heaps by sending that kind of note home, which is really fairly sternly written almost. I just say, ‘Look, if you don’t fairly strictly adhere to this, you’re almost certainly going to have to return the instrument, or spend money getting it fixed up.’ That’s exactly what happens when they buy it from the local guitar shop.”

As far as practice goes, Oliver says, “If they’re doing 5 or 10 minutes a few times a week that’s all they need to do, but probably in second term I’d start to insist that they actually are doing it more formally.” Oliver has devised a practice chart for the term, each week divided into seven segments. “I talk about [the fact that] they’ve got to get into the healthy zone…which is anything from three upwards, and you know, obviously the more red they colour in, if they practise five or six times, their [chart] looks good – hot stuff – you know, whatever, you know they’re doing well. I think it has a little bit of an appeal to it, rather than putting a number in a box, so I kind of liked it.”

Oliver has found that the parents will sign the practice sheet. “When I use it properly, like, and I do sometimes follow it a lot more strictly, like check it every week, yeah the parents definitely sign it and everything, so it kind-of works, if you can make the effort to really follow through on it. But to do that takes so many minutes out of your lesson, so you’ve got to weigh up [whether or not you are] willing to sacrifice your lesson time to tick these things and check them.”
In terms of student practice levels, Oliver has noted a decline in more recent years.

“It’s just a mega-mortgage belt [around the school in which he was observed] where...both parents have to work as much as possible to supply all the latest gadgets....Everybody’s got to have everything straight away, including the instant stardom thing, so it’s all, I mean, it all ties together....So many parents are just working late that they don’t have time to sit with the kids and do anything...or the kids aren’t home. They’re at after-school care or before-school care every day....I think that’s a big cause of decrease in...commitment to practice, but I also think there’s a certain superficiality to a lot of approaches to education as a whole....Parents want their kids to be seen to be doing things, but really aren’t willing to follow up...make the kids do it properly, if they’re going to do something....I think, in education as a whole...so many schools now are becoming much, much more competitive about results and competitions as opposed to when I first started teaching. I don’t think the schools cared [about results/competitions in years gone by]. Basically if you did well, that was great, but if you didn’t, that wasn’t an issue. Now, they almost vet your group before they let you go in it. Some of the schools are getting very, very picky, you know, and really expecting to see results....It’s a bit like the whole NAPLAN\textsuperscript{17} thing – teaching them to do well in a competition....There’s a bit of that, I think, that’s crept in [to instrumental teaching] as well, over the years.”

Oliver, as the only participant in the study who has an auditioning process for entry into the beginner group string program, has a thorough selection procedure in place. Initial recommendations from the classroom music teacher, as well as commendations from regular classroom teachers and administrative personnel, are factors contributing to an offer to audition. A letter, inviting children to apply for an audition, is sent home to the parent/caregiver. Areas including pitch, rhythm and physical suitability are part of the trial

\textsuperscript{17} NAPLAN is the acronym for The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy, which is a testing program implemented annually in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in all Australian schools.
process. After the audition process, students deemed suitable to be involved are then invited, by letter, to join the program. Details regarding general costs, hire of instruments, and a brief explanation of what participation in the program involves, are communicated in the letter. For students who sign up to be involved, a subsequent letter is sent home explaining the pitfalls of purchasing a suitable instrument sight-unseen or over the internet. This letter details important information for buying instruments and accessories that will effectively service the learning of a stringed instrument.

Of the successfully auditioning year three [school year] students who then elect to start group string classes with Oliver, he observes, “I find that I’ve probably got rid of them by [year six or seven] if they’re going to go. Those kids that have stuck, they’ve obviously liked it enough to keep going, but also have a little bit of ability….The attrition rate’s not huge in my primary schools. I lose a few every year.” Asked whether or not he allows students of higher year levels as beginners into the program he commented, “Sometimes. I used to do more of that. Nowadays, mainly for curriculum reasons, I have to try and keep it [to the year threes only]….You have to time lessons around the specialist timetable and in this school it’s sometimes almost impossible to make the lessons work on the day you’re here because there’s [sic] so many things you have to dodge.”

In terms of flexibility with students and lessons and rehearsals, Oliver says, “I try and be reasonably flexible because I find particularly once you get into senior high school if you’re not flexible, you lose your kids….At the high school [for which the local primary schools are “feeders”], up until this year, because I didn’t have the big numbers, I was actually negotiating a timetable every week at the end of the rehearsal [in the morning before school], with all the kids, because I only had about 18 kids in the whole program, so I could negotiate [with] every group [to] come at a time that would work for that group for that day, and I had really, really good attendance. I hardly missed any kids, so I didn’t follow any
strict timetable. I didn’t bother writing one in the end - the lesson schedule. [It was] unorthodox, but it works [sic]. See you’d never - stuff like this would never be recommended because it doesn’t fit the model and the system, and yet it produces much better results for me. Every kid actually came because I was able to make the lesson work for them. There were very few times when it wouldn’t work because I could negotiate each week – you come [at this time] this week, and you’re still trying not to double so they’re [not] missing the same things two weeks in a row or anything. This year with double the numbers – I’ve got almost forty kids now – I can’t do that anymore so I’ve had to do the formal timetable, and straight away the attendance has gone down, because they can’t miss things, like they’ve got exams on – I can’t then start swapping once it’s fixed and people have left, and with forty kids it takes too long.”

Oliver’s solution to limited time with beginner students in the primary school contexts has been to negotiate 45-minute classes for students in the first year of tuition. Rather than two smaller groups for 30 minutes, he teaches one larger group for 45 minutes, and the classroom teachers “saw that it was actually better for them as well. They were initially worried that the kids couldn’t concentrate for 45 minutes. I’ve had no dramas with that before, in any of the other schools over the last few years where I’ve been doing it....They’re beginners, so if it’s a half hour lesson, you’re lucky to get 20 minutes. So now, to get 30 or 35 minutes of genuine work time – it’s great!”

Once students become established in his programs, Oliver opts to transfer a competent violinist across to double bass. “You can’t afford to have the wrong kid on bass.” Allowing time to get the measure of a student before transferring him/her across to bass is his way of ensuring success. He uses small scholarships to attract violinists to learn viola. “The problem you are [most] likely to encounter [rather than a parent complaining about the inequity of someone else getting a scholarship] is the parental concern, ‘But we bought him this violin.
How come they’re [sic] not going to use it? ” Oliver’s solution is that they do both violin and viola. “A lot of kids start viola and end up really liking it.”

It was during the second set of class observations that the importance of reading in Oliver’s group string teaching approach was particularly noted. He underscored his philosophy on this when questioned about the level of priority given to assisting students in learning to read music notation: “The Szilvay stuff is geared to get them reading really early.” With respect to developing his own tutor book, he commented, “What I found...was that the kids could memorize things too easily in that book [another beginner string tutor] – the tunes - because they’re so predictable. In the end I realised after years that they weren’t reading anything. So I thought, ‘I’m going to write slightly more obscure rests in places so they’re actually forced to keep their eye on the sheet, at least to a large degree.’ I mean, that’s the theory behind it. It probably hasn’t worked perfectly, but I think it’s a little bit more geared at reading.” He further notes, “They [the Colourstrings authors] write really whacky stuff in there, some of them – things with five [in a bar] - so they have to connect....It’s actually purposely done like that, so I’ve actually used the same idea in this, so as not to make it too repetitive. I mean you have to have some repetitive [material] so they can actually play it in a group situation, otherwise you’d get nothing [done]. But yeah, that’s sort of the idea behind this open [string, first] term stuff.”

Asked whether or not Oliver endeavoured to relate his adapted Colourstrings-style program to its Kodaly roots, he responded, “A few years ago I tried to get them to sing a little bit of basic sol-fa, but...since [Kodaly’s] not really being done in the classrooms anymore... it’s pretty hard to be doing it here [in the string classes].” So singing is only used as part of the audition/recruiting process to ascertain inherent musicality and the likelihood of prospective students’ success in learning strings.
When asked about the auditory assault of bad intonation and poor tone quality typical of beginner string classes, Oliver responded, “I think it’s something I’ve always been able to cope with pretty well. It doesn’t seem to bother me. I mean the intonation bothers me, but I think if you can’t cope with that, you can’t do the job – not for the long term, anyway. The basic sound of kids scratching away – if you can’t handle that noise, you can’t really do the job, can you?”

For Oliver, the community dimension of music making is perhaps the most significant motivator. Reflecting upon the time spent teaching violin in Scandinavia twenty years earlier, he comments, “In the school and in the community – it was rural – I really liked that side [the community aspect] and that sort of stuck with me when I came back here [to Queensland] and started teaching...and that’s when I developed [a regional youth string orchestra], which was like my version of a community kind-of music making thing, which it has been for almost the last twenty years.”

Ann: Participant 2

Ann “learnt from a very young age that it didn’t just have to be about being at school in string orchestra – music could be everywhere and it could be all sorts of things.” Her very first teacher not only set up the technique of her students very well, but also contextualized what they were doing. “It wasn’t just about having a lesson and learning how to play – we were straight away into chamber music....I just fell in love with my music teachers – my classroom music teachers as well [as my violin teacher].” From about seven years of age Ann always wanted to be a music teacher. As a child she would role-play teaching a whole class of children. By playing the same piece over and over again in different ways, she would pretend to be different students in her imaginary class.
As a student at a progressive primary school, she had a lead role in a completely child-led musical. “It was one of those life-changing things...we did our science and our maths and our history and everything immersed through this task of putting on a show.” This concept of musical “immersion” has featured heavily across her string teaching career. The term, “immersion”, is used in this research to mean that students have multiple, weekly, music-education experiences. Added to this is the notion that children are immersed in the breadth of aural, written and tactile aspects of music education as a package.

Ann was fortunate to have a series of very good string teachers through her childhood and teenage school years, learning only through Education Queensland group string classes until her mid-teens. “There were a lot of really talented students...but in the end the group probably came down to about only three of us. When I finally went [to] private [lessons], there were just a couple of other girls who were of a similar standard, [who] probably could have gone on to study music themselves.”

The positive nature of her relationships with her teachers was such that Ann still maintains contact with them. “I’m still in contact with all of my teachers, even the first teacher,” she recounts. Her first violin teacher “was very heavily trained in Rolland and Nelson...and that’s had a big impact on all of my approach and ideas as well.... She set us up really, really well, but she also contextualized it....She was really big on...making the music make sense in other contexts....I learnt from a very young age that it didn’t just have to be about being at school in string orchestra – music could be everywhere and it be all sorts of things, to that’s been really inspiring to me....[My husband’s] been a big influence as well...and I guess probably the biggest influences are my own kids too on my teaching – watching their journey – when I think about it....I notice that everything that I’ve been doing educationally has kind of mirrored where they’ve been at.”
Her very first tutor book, “Right from the start”, was written by Sheila Nelson. “And when I first started doing teaching, I used that same approach.” Ann reflects. Over the years, she has incorporated a lot of the English string teaching material into her programs. Commenting on the Katherine and Hugh Colledge materials she remarks, “I love it – the piano accompaniments are gorgeous….I really love the Shooting Stars, and I used to use that a lot more, but again it’s a similar sequence. Another similar sequence is the beginning of “Joggers” – “Fiddle Time Joggers” [by Katherine and Hugh Blackwell]....There are quite a number out there that I found really worked for a whole combination – the physicality – keeping the finger relaxed, and the more fingers they put down, sometimes tension and that can come in, so I really liked that, but I was determined to get it [the first finger] across [all of the strings] - like starting on the G string, not just keeping everything on the D string – getting across the strings for this [bow] arm level, but also this swinging thing in the [left] elbow.” It is worth remembering that Sheila Nelson studied with Paul Rolland during the time he was developing “The teaching of action in string playing”. The gross motor skill activities which were developed through his work, and harnessed by Nelson, have now filtered down into Ann’s approach.

Not only did Ann have great continuity with her teachers, she was fortunate to have teachers with exceptional pedigree and performing experience. Her first group string class teacher was the daughter of a concert pianist in London. “She was in the first – her first cello class in London was with Jacqueline Du Pre – they were friends!...so she obviously had good pedigree, musical pedigree and...she was set up really well, so I do think about that often....I think she even worked with Paul Rolland. I think she might have actually had sessions with him. So I feel that even though I’m not really 100% sure of exactly what Rolland did, that I probably have inherited some of that.”
Another really good teacher who Ann had during her junior secondary school years was the past leader of the Queensland Youth Orchestra. “She was a good player. I don’t know what made her decide to [go up to the country centre in which Ann was raised]…but again, I was very lucky that I had a really fine musician as a teacher…and she set up a really great string program at [the secondary school which Ann attended].”

Ann recounted that her first private teacher “was from the Covent Garden Opera Orchestra…and she absolutely threw me in the deep end….She was the person who really got my playing up to a high standard through big challenges and lots of encouragement….I was just learning in groups all the way up till fifteen [years of age]…and she actually said to me – and she’s a very dogmatic person – ‘You shouldn’t be a teacher – you should be a performer. Don’t think of teaching – that’s rubbish!’ You know, she really took me off-track from the teaching thing at that point and told me that I was good enough to play anywhere in the world, and that I should be a performer.”

Ann continued her studies on violin at a tertiary level. “My undergraduate degree studying performance was very up and down and wasn’t a very happy time actually,” she reflects. Ann described her undergraduate training in string pedagogy as “fairly non-existent… and [that] when [she] first started doing teaching [she] used the same approach [as she had learnt in her childhood]. She notes that her “whole journey and [the] whole process has been [her] training…[her] experimenting….A lot of it, though, has just been…trial and error. I have done a lot of my own research, but it hasn’t been formal and I haven’t got any accreditation for [it].”

After finishing her undergraduate degree she proceeded then to complete a performance Masters degree with an inspiring teacher at a tertiary institution in Queensland.
It was still “a performance focus” and then she “started doing a bit of professional work, but,” in her own words, “at the heart of it, really, I always wanted to teach.”

During that time she had the opportunity to take on work at an early childhood music school, eventually becoming the proprietor. The overarching aspect of Ann’s drive was always her desire to be a music teacher. Although trained in performance, when she had the “opportunity to take on the early childhood school, [she] just loved it....I [was] at home. This [was] exactly what I [wanted] to be doing.”

The curriculum of Ann’s early childhood music school involved “a combination of Orff and Kodaly.” As the proprietor, she “stumbled across the Encore18 piano series...I’m not a piano specialist but I was in a position to teach beginner keyboard. I found that a fantastic method, um particularly the junior program, they way they approach it with the brilliant backing tracks and sort of the methodology and also the beautiful sequence I had been doing, which was a combination of Kodaly and Dalcroze and just my own spontaneity in early childhood stuff and it was really a transition, and that’s what really inspired me to write my own method....I’ve adapted it [her tutor book], obviously, for the different contexts [in which she has taught] because after I set that up in my private studio and I was having a lot of success starting kids with this method, I then implemented it at [another school] where I was specializing as a string tutor in the junior school, and that was, um, sort of year one to five, and I was using it there and had a lot of success.”

Ann notes further, “The motivation for producing the tutor book was way back when I was – and it was a different version of it – when I was working with three and four year-olds and I wanted a visual representation of what I was doing....On one side I would have the letter names with the fingers...and I’d have the notation as well [on the other side], so that

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18 Encore! Music education: Creating smart musicians, is a complete series of piano teaching materials created by Brisbane keyboard specialist, Mark Gibson
they’d see both of them when they were [playing], and I would just sort of go from student to student as to when it was better just to look at the notation...[She] was coming up with enough of [her] own material, and having [a husband] with [high level] keyboard skills” meant that she could “do [her] own thing.”

Ann’s first violin teacher, being heavily trained in Rolland and Nelson, had a big impact on her ideas and teaching approach. Her notion of introducing only the first finger in conjunction with the open string finds its roots in Sheila Nelson’s approach. Nelson (1985) discovered that “stepwise movement is easier to turn into tunes in the head than the traditional beginner-reader’s diet of tunes using open strings and first one finger, then two then three” (p. 71). The next generation of British string teachers (e.g., Colledge, 1998; & Blackwell, 2001), who have published significant beginner string tutor materials and ensemble music, have adhered to this approach.

Book One of Ann’s two sequential tutor books moves quickly to the use of the four open strings [with interesting but manageable combinations of rhythms], whereas the American tutor material typically majors on strings A and D, then moves to G and finally to the fourth string [E or C, depending on which instrument]. Students using this open string material, in the lessons observed by the researcher, appeared to really enjoy the pieces, playing them with verve and enthusiasm. The second half of the tutor uses the first finger only, in conjunction with the open strings already learnt. Using tunes from significant musical masterworks of Western music heritage, Latin tunes, as well as original material, the book is reliant upon the effective backing compact disc to make musical sense. “It was one of those things where I thought, well I can copy this and copy that and renotate that [sic] and renotate that, and by the time I actually thought, well, especially having [my husband] – his

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19 From the publication of ‘All for Strings’ in 1984, to the present day, American heterogeneous string tutor books have generally followed a similar plan – short strokes on open A and D strings, with the progressive introduction of all fingers down on these two strings; then the introduction of the G string and finally the E (for violin).
Got ‘em on a string

[high level] accompanying, we can kind of do our own thing and what I was finding...was [that I was] coming up with enough of my own material that I thought, ‘Um, yeah,’ [I might as well write my own].” The design of this book parallels the sequence of the British pedagogues mentioned above, progressing from open strings to the use of the first finger only, on each of the four strings.

“When I first started doing teaching, I used that same approach, then what I found, when I actually started sort of analysing the approach and looking at how some people were starting with all fingers down and some people start with third finger first, going backwards, for me – and one of the excuses, or not excuse, but one of the strong justifications that a lot of other people have said for not starting with the first finger is that they don’t want to get this kind of thing [gestures a collapsed left wrist], and I think well, you know, there are other ways to avoid and not have a student with that kind of hand shape – you can still encourage a really nice hand shape. The reason for the first finger is really a lot to do with intonation, ‘cause to me, when you start learning to move from first to half to second to third [position] it’s all the first finger, so for me I guess I figure that to start with that first finger across the strings [is my preference], and the other thing I found, particularly working with little kids, is that it was just such a beautiful, easy thing for literacy – music literacy – because they could see the open strings and then they could easily identify [Researcher – “one note away”], yeah and the difference between the fifths – playing open strings they could read that really well, they could read their rhythms and if you just introduced that first finger one note away, in relation to those open strings – I found the sequence and expediency at which they would learn to read the notes was a lot better, rather than, you know, the sort of three note do-re-mi or mi-re-do kind of thing which can sometimes be confusing. They confuse a second finger [on violin] with an open string – I found a little bit.”
Apart from the material which she generates, Ann incorporates other supplementary material into the first year of her compulsory group string program, “things like Stephen Chin’s “24 Concert Pieces”\textsuperscript{20} and a few other things from the “Encore [on Strings]”\textsuperscript{21} book…. We could go on to book two, but we save that for the second year.” She received a complimentary copy of the American tutor book, “Orchestral Adventures” at an AUSTA conference in the mid-2000’s, “and then started here [the school at which she now teaches] and our program was very much based on the American kind-of class, you know, doing orchestra class – I thought…I’ll get it in and see if I can actually utilize it as a method, but I found I just kept coming back to my own sequence, so then we just disbanded it as an actual method and I use it as a resource.”

Ann’s second tutor book builds upon the first, introducing all of the notes from the diatonic major scale, using a similar stylistic mix of musical content as in book one – original tunes, arrangements of Latin pieces, as well as standard ‘classical’ repertoire. Whereas the students play, for the most part, accompanying figures in the first volume, in book two the strings generally carry the melody, with the accompanying parts carried by the backing track.

With regards to the use of her own music in beginner string ensemble concerts, Ann notes that people write to her saying things like, “I was so amazed, impressed.” She says, “They’ve been really impressed with the musical presentation, the energy and the precision, and the ensemble.” She notes that the beginner group gets up “and they’re playing open strings with heaps of vibrancy and bows in the air and all in time, with big backing tracks and everything, and I used to think the parents would be like, ‘Oh, I wish we could hear a tune,’ but it’s been quite the opposite.” Ann notes that some teachers will say, “But my students would be so bored if they couldn’t put their fingers down at such-and-such a time.”

\textsuperscript{20} Stephen Chin is a Brisbane-based string teacher who writes student-level string ensemble music published by Everything String.
\textsuperscript{21} Encore on strings, by Brisbane string specialists, Keith and Natalie Sharp, and keyboard specialist, Mark Gibson, is published through Encore! Music education: Creating smart musicians.
She continues, “I guess there still is that perception, but I don’t know how much of that is actually coming from the parents. [Perhaps that’s] just our idea of what we think [as group instrumental teachers], and here [at this school] we are able to test it.”

Ann sees her approach to group string teaching very much as the product of a journey. She feels a sense of having worked a great deal in isolation. Through much experimenting and trial and error, she has carved out her own way of group string teaching, using elements from Dalcroze, Kodaly and Sheila Nelson, as well as gleanings from the Australian Strings Association conferences and workshops. Some twenty or so years after beginning teaching, Ann has built a strong string program at a private school in Brisbane, where she utilizes the method books that she has authored for her group string classes.

The Australian Strings Association [AUSTA] has had a very significant impact upon Ann and her development as a string teacher. Through AUSTA, Ann completed workshops on how to apply Dalcroze to strings. She completed Summer Schools, Winter Schools, and Easter weekend programs. “There was a time when I was very heavily involved in AUSTA and so all off those kinds of workshops I would attend….I guess when I say ‘research’, for me it’s just been taking a whole lot of different varying ideas from Suzuki, from Rolland and Sheila Nelson and my own teachers…I haven’t had the time, unfortunately, to give to AUSTA in recent years [as I have in the past], but I’ve always found it so inspiring, and I did everything I could. I was on the committee and all that sort of thing.”

Whilst she did not nominate any particularly significant guest speakers or aspects of AUSTA conferences that had a critical impact upon her, she recounts, “I remember being at an AUSTA conference – I mean the interesting thing is finding those parallels you have with

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22 Early in the 1900s, Swiss-born music educator, Dalcroze, began espousing his method of teaching musical concepts through movement. The approach combines solfege, improvisation and eurhythmics (musical expression through movement).
people even though you’ve never met them and they’ve never met you – there’s [sic] these universal ideas – I guess that’s what you’re looking at...because I know a lot of people who were at the AUTSA conference, and I was teaching their kids at the time, their little ones.

They came up and said, ‘That’s just you – that’s what you do!’"

Ann explains that, even though she has tried to, she has not done much Orff training because “that’s not very accessible up here [in Queensland], but Kodaly – I haven’t done the big Summer School thing...but I’ve been to some...early [childhood] music-focused Kodaly workshops....Really, I think, I’ve been working very much in isolation. I’d be interested to know what kind of parallels I have to other teachers who I’ve never worked with, because really, it’s almost been by default – not necessarily because this is the way I want to do it. This is the way life, the journey [has unfolded]. I’ve ended up working pretty-much in isolation...although I have often had an opportunity to team-teach with other people.”

After her early childhood music-teaching experience, Ann gradually moved into primary and secondary schools in the South East Queensland region. Ann teaches smaller upper string groups of between four and eight, but there is some large group team-teaching in the program. The instrumental music “immersion” day early in the school year sees the lower strings specialist and Ann teaching separate classes during the first part of the day, then a combined effort with groups of more than 30. The compulsory beginner string ensemble involves Ann plus the lower strings specialist in a weekly, before-school rehearsal with nearly forty students.

At the independent, all-boys school in which Ann currently works, the executive and administrative arm of the college is very supportive of the music program. Early in the school

23 Carl Orff founded an approach to music education in the early 1900s called Orff Schulwerk (School work). It combines movement, singing, playing and improvisation. The use of ostinato patterns and percussion instruments are a feature of his method.
year, a whole day is set aside for the complete year five cohort to undertake an instrumental music immersion day.

The first of two observations of Ann’s group string classes was at that introductory all-day workshop. The first observation was of a thirty-five minute session which was part of a whole-day rotating instrumental music program. The class time involved a series of activities designed to introduce a variety of left hand and right hand string-playing techniques. The tempo of the lesson was fairly fast, with a quick succession of motor skill activities undertaken [e.g. bow manipulation exercises - ‘windscreen wipers’, ‘stirring the pot’, and ‘rocket ship’]. Kodaly rhythm names were used in the session, with students firstly saying the name rhythms that they were about to play on open strings with their bows. Later that day, all of the upper and lower string students [43 in total], gathered as a heterogeneous class directed by the participant and supported by the lower strings specialist. Ann directed from the front whilst the lower strings specialist assisted with the cellos and basses.

The second observation, of an ensemble rehearsal with thirty-nine students, involved Ann directing the students from the front, with a lower-strings specialist teacher assisting. As an ensemble rehearsal, the focus was mainly on playing through the pieces for an up-coming concert. Incorporated into the rehearsal were some aspects of teaching theory and musicality from the pieces being rehearsed – dynamics, rhythms, col legno, ostinato – and some singing. Ann used questioning techniques not only to elicit answers from the students but also to enhance their engagement in the ensemble learning experience. The “lovely big string sound” produced by the students was commended, but the class was encouraged to be careful with some of the rhythms. The ten-year-old boys participating showed general enthusiasm.
Ann was involved with the end-of-semester middle and senior school ensembles concert, not only as director of the string group, but also as master of ceremonies. Three string ensembles, all under the direction of the participant, played at the concert. The intermediate strings, consisting of 10 violins, five violas, six cellos and two double basses, was made up mostly of year seven students, but included a year 10 cellist, “not quite up to senior level”. All of the students would be at least in their third year of tuition. Pieces played included “Rodeo” from “Headin’ West Suite” by Timo Jarvela, a level one piece, and “Fiddlers Ahoy”, a level one and a half piece by Stephen Chin.

Ann’s senior strings included eight violins, three violas, seven cellos and one double bass. The repertoire performed included “Sentimental Sarabande”, from Britten’s “Simple Symphony”, and “Amadeus”, arranged by Hoffman, which includes excerpts from works like Mozart’s Symphony No. 25 in G minor. These pieces are graded at the “medium-easy” level (Owen, 1996).

Ann’s premiere string ensemble, the senior chamber strings, played undirected during intermission. The mainstay of their repertoire was baroque pieces arranged by Sheila Nelson from her “Tunes for My String Quartet” publication. The chosen pieces sit mostly between level two and three, and were easily managed by the group, consisting of five violins, one viola, three cellos and one bass. The ensemble leader directed the ensemble. Other pieces included the Purcell theme used by Britten in his “Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra”, and an arrangement of a movement from the Four Seasons by Vivaldi.

Ann notes that the integration of the program at the school in which she teaches “is quite cohesive, because the classroom or academic [music] component has come after the fact, so the instrumental’s come first….I think if it was the other way around, as it is in many other schools – if they started with a classroom program and they had to somehow implement
Got ‘em on a string

*a kind of quasi-instrumental music curriculum - that it would have a very different feel to it, maybe.” Students receive a small group string lesson [upper strings separate from lower], a compulsory large group ensemble rehearsal, and a class music lesson, which she takes. “I think the other great thing about my job here is that – and we are all so lucky – is that we have to do a bit of everything – a bit of classroom, a bit of private [teaching], a bit of group [tuition], a bit of ensemble [rehearsal], and it just makes the day so much better….I’m a bit selfish because I’m the one teacher teaching all of the classroom components in grade five…. [I] can really focus on the responding to music, and the listening to music, and the analysing [of] music and the composition... the performance component is well and truly taken care of in the instrumental [program], so we’ve got a little bit more time, I think, to...do whatever we want.”

Since the starting year at the school in which Ann currently teaches is year five, this effectively negates any choice regarding beginning age for string programs in the school [Any later would significantly diminish the chance of longer term success of the program].

Ann works at a school where participation in instrumental music is compulsory in year five, so no audition process is undertaken. Instead, there is a selection process [“a careful process of introduction and learning about the instruments, followed by surveys of the boys and parents and some tests designed to get boys on the instrument that is most suited to their wishes and physical attributes” – school website] for students to choose which instrument they would like to learn – either strings or band. A thorough follow-up process occurs, where parents/carers are informed regarding the program, including aspects like the hire/purchase of instruments. The term one, whole-day introductory program, culminating in a mini-concert combined with a meet-the-teacher twilight event, launches the compulsory instrumental program for the year.
From the compulsory group string program, which she runs, approximately 30% of the students elect to continue beyond the initial two years. The major glitch at present is the attrition during the middle school phase. Ann’s concern with the two-year compulsory program is that “we’ve held off for yet another year the kids getting down to business...in terms of really focusing, committing and learning the instrument, not just ‘This is something I have to do’.” Ann’s preference would be to trim the compulsory group string program back to just one year instead of two.

“And so, I would like to (and we’re in discussions about it – we have been for a long time) just see it happen in grade five, and then get down to business from grade six.” For Ann, the transition from junior to middle school poses the greatest threat to continuity with her students. “The big problem that we have across all the instruments is that middle school – so seven, eight, nine - we can, see – I guess we can claim that if we’ve got them over the line from six into seven, good, fantastic, but then what we find is [attrition] into eight and into nine....What I’d ideally like to do is see that in grade 6 it just goes to sort of a normal, um, elective. Being in a private school, I guess, [that] would be one-on-one private lessons.” Ann comments, “I think, then, the transition from junior to middle school is not necessarily working that effectively [because] we’ve held off for yet another year of the kids really getting down to business.”

I mean, in my ideal, ideal world, um, P-12 co-ed, or be in the state system – I really love the state system program – it’s what I came through, and sometimes I really don’t know why I’m not working in the state system, because I think I would really fit in and really love [it] – I really value the, um the philosophy behind it and the opportunities given. Specialists are there in the school, providing for strings from grade three small group tuition, and an ensemble experience as well as classroom music – um, and that ostensibly is provided pretty-much free to the parents, and it’s accessible, and as you say, there are some excellent,
amazing teachers out there doing amazing things and so I’ve got a lot of respect for the way the state school program is run, and a lot of the things we try to do here when we’re making reform is really only getting it back to a similar model.”

Perhaps the most noteworthy dynamic of Ann’s teaching approach is her focus upon “bringing it all back to the music and the aesthetic experience.” Her overriding preoccupation with “immersion”, and the contextualization of the learning experience, means having “the music make sense in other contexts.” Ann seeks to immerse her students in their musical experience. “I believe in immersion. I think immersion’s the thing,” she says. “Orchestral Expressions” [is] great because it’s got all these recordings of full pieces of music and teachers are encouraged that even if it’s just as the students are coming into the room that you’ve got that segment from Beethoven’s ninth symphony playing as they come and get seated and then as they leave you can be playing Vivaldi “Spring”, and just the whole idea of immersing students in music and letting it still affect them.”

“I put together, in the holidays, a massive workbook, um and so what I’m trying, what I’m aiming to do with the students is I want to expose them to masterworks. I want them listening [to] and [being] immersed in beautiful music; I want them to learn the language that they’ll be using eventually in the curriculum about the elements of music and dynamics and all of that which again will be being reinforced in their band and string program….We do want to have a little bit more of an approach to theory that’s separate to the theory you pick up learning an instrument, though we are getting them all, irrespective of what instrument they’re learning, they’re all capable of reading the notes on the treble clef.”

I’m also doing singing with them…not so much a Kodaly-based singing program….I’m picking up bits and pieces from all over the place. There’s [sic] some

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24 Orchestral Expressions (2008). Alfred Publishing Co. Inc. is an America group string tutor that features professionally recorded ‘classic’ orchestral repertoire and backing tracks.
Polynesian echo songs I’ve been doing with them....We’ve got grandparents’ day coming up later in the term...and I’m thinking how amazing it would be for all 140 boys sitting down [with] their grandparents to just start singing in the auditorium...in a few weeks time, so singing’s really important, listening to music, responding, being aware of it.” Part of the ensemble rehearsal observed included a segment devoted to the students singing a song to be presented the following week at the end-of-semester school concert.

In terms of practice expectations “the recommendation I give to parents at the information evening at the beginning [of the year] is, um, three to four minimum [practices of] fifteen minutes, if you can, but um – and some of them do it, some do a lot more, and a lot of them don’t even touch it – I know that...What I say to the parents is, ‘It’s muscle memory and, um, it’s just so important that they’re making physical contact with the instrument and [that they don’t need to] be long sessions, but shorter.” Whilst Ann hasn’t noted a decline in practice routines over the years, she did comment on the differing levels of commitment between the students at the different private schools in which she has taught. It seems that school culture has an impact on levels of application.

Reflecting again on the ‘Encore’ piano series, Ann comments, “I don’t know that there are many piano methods with these ‘crazy’ backing tracks – Latin backing tracks and the kids are just playing ‘C’, but [emphasis added by Ann] – they develop such a strong sense of, well, of pulse – being able to play in time, but also it was a really interesting harmonic sequence, like they would learn things in C, then these kids, these little kids – and I was teaching six and seven year olds [at the time] – could just transpose everything into G major....They could do A minor and E minor and all of this and I was so impressed with the aural development and it got me thinking too about [the fact that] we don’t do a lot of harmonic training with string players, which is funny, because we’ve got the perfect harmonic instrument really – we’ve got the tonic and the dominant right there – so they can
understand chords I and IV if you choose to teach them, and in our classes we’re just getting to...the idea of just playing the bass notes of the progression and they really start hearing and knowing when it’s about to change chord, which I think is another aspect of musicality that string players don’t often get into, because we’re very much melody-based...and I like to try and see if we can develop that [sense of harmony] too.”

Ann recounts, “I think in my own development, if I look back to when I first started as a teacher, the big change is taking things slower with my students. And I see a lot of ‘wet-behind-the-ears’ teachers. I think they try to go far too quickly....I make no apology to my students for keeping them on open strings for quite a while, and making sure [that things are set up] alright. And I think part of what taught me that was working with such little children, working in early childhood, seeing how much repetition is important and how much staying within a particular phase is OK, you know and then creatively just building on the current skill level, and repeating that in as many different ways as you can, but not necessarily – so to me it’s more a linear development, rather than a – no sorry, a more lateral rather than linear. I do a lot more moving sideways or expanding from where we are but not feeling it’s just a ladder and you’re going up and up the ladder to the next thing.”

“Teaching really little kids – having that responsibility where people are coming and paying you money to teach two-year-olds this music, and what that means and what that is – how you measure it and all that was a big ‘wow’ moment for me because it really made me think, ‘What is it? What are we really trying to teach here?’ It’s a combination of those concrete skills ... but also it’s an art...and the beauty of it and how it makes you feel and all of that sort of thing, but the challenge of [being] a strings teacher particularly, of trying to keep that esoteric – the art alive and meaningful – when there’s so many black and white concrete things that need to be tackled as well.”
Yoshi: Participant 3

Yoshi has worked as a string specialist for over twenty-five years. During his time as a school student, Yoshi “had about six teachers” for violin. In his early primary years he “learnt to read fluently in a year” using “A Tune a Day”\(^{25}\). He subsequently went for a year to the USA with his family and learnt through a Suzuki program there. “\textit{It was dead easy because I just took the book home and learnt all the pieces because I could read them – they [the other students in the class] couldn’t. They were all singing A1, A4, 3D.}”

Yoshi had an enjoyable and productive musical experience during his high school years. He reflects, “I had a lot of fun playing violin at school. I had a wonderful teacher. She was quite a demanding teacher. She commanded respect. I only had her there for, perhaps, four years and in that time she built up three substantial string orchestras – we used to play all around town in Brisbane...we just had all sorts of great experiences.” They did the usual competitions and played in numerous venues around, including places like Government House, and had “all sorts of great experiences.” As a school student, one of the great highlights was doing the complete Four Seasons, by Vivaldi. Yoshi featured as a soloist in part of one of the concertos. These positive adolescent experiences appear to have had a significant bearing upon his subsequent decision to pursue music beyond the school years and to forge a career path as a string specialist. His teacher had significant connections with one of the tertiary institutions in Brisbane, and after his high-schooling years went on to study music there.

After completing his undergraduate music degree majoring on violin, Yoshi then moved to Tasmania to undertake postgraduate studies in violin and stayed there as a musician and teacher, playing with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra for about five years as a

\(^{25}\) A tune a day, by C. Paul Herfuth, was the series title for a popular American instrumental tutor book which was published in the mid-1900s for various instruments.
contract player. After spending six more years in a string-teaching post in another of the southern states of Australia, he eventually returned to South East Queensland, where he has remained ever since.

Just prior to his return to South East Queensland, Yoshi took a working holiday in the USA, which included a visit to the Mid-West Clinic International Band, Orchestra and Music Conference\textsuperscript{26}. [He spent a total of fifteen months as a school student across two stays in the USA, the first stay mentioned earlier, and second during his high school education.]

Interestingly though, in terms of string pedagogy, Yoshi felt that conferences organised by the Australian Strings Association had a far greater impact upon his development as a strings teacher. At multiple AUSTA conferences he was able to observe master teachers in action – Sheila Nelson, Gerald Fischbach\textsuperscript{27} and Marvin Rabin\textsuperscript{28}, to name a few.

Yoshi did a “methods of string teaching” course in the third year of tertiary training. He notes the commitment of the university string pedagogy lecturer to take “a bunch of us to the AUSTA [Australian Strings Association] conference in Sydney [mid-1980’s].” Yoshi was also fortunate to have had “a very clever teacher at school who insisted that [he] sit in on some beginner lessons... with [another teacher] who was teaching Colourstrings even then! [early 1980’s].” During the third year of his undergraduate degree he comments, “That’s probably where I came across this method, amongst others...” The university string pedagogy lecturer had “such an open mind about different methods, so she [saw] the strengths in Suzuki and she [saw] what Rolland did in America, Colourstrings, positive

\textsuperscript{26} The Midwest Clinic began in 1946, when approximately 120 music directors from the Chicago area assembled for a six-hour clinic and new music reading session. Over the years, the Midwest Band Clinic has continued to focus on bringing international music directors into contact with the best published music available, with new and established teaching techniques, and the latest products and services for the music educator.

\textsuperscript{27} Gerald Fischbach is a leading American string teacher and pedagogue who has authored method books (Viva Vibrato, Artistry in Strings) and instructional videos.

\textsuperscript{28} Marvin Rabin was a significant American string development specialist, internationally known for his leadership of the youth orchestra movement in the USA.
criticism of what to be careful of, you know.” In terms of string teaching mentors, the university pedagogy lecturer ranked as the number one influence on Yoshi’s formal string-teacher training, “and then going to AUSTA conferences and seeing clever teachers from all over the world,” as the next most significant aspect of his development. “Watching other colleagues...through AUSTA in Brisbane,” has also left its mark.

“AUSTA in Brisbane’s phenomenal!” recounts Yoshi. For string pedagogy [AUSTA has been the key ingredient in my professional development], absolutely. I’ve pretty much been to all the AUSTA conferences except the first one. Marvin Rabin was out and...he said, ‘Make sure you go to the Mid-West [orchestra and band conference]. That’s the one to go to – and it’s huge. Thousands of people go there. It was good but [participant pause for emphasis] it wasn’t a patch on an AUSTA conference in terms of string pedagogy….The tone of the conference was a bit like a shopping mall – people would come and look at a session, then they’d think it’s boring and they’d go somewhere else. People would get up after twenty minutes and just walk out and slam the door, halfway through session...whereas in Australia people would pay to go to a session...sit there, then ask questions, and have a lot of respect.”

Yoshi notes the influence of Nelson and other English pedagogues upon his teaching. “Sheila Nelson was phenomenal. I saw Sheila Nelson teach a room of, perhaps, 150 primary school kids do sautille in10 minutes flat, using her Dragonfly piece....She could command a whole room full of kids.” Another is Mary Cohen. “She writes really good, essentially teaching studies that are musical pieces. A lot of them are in the AMEB books now.” Yoshi comments on the impact of the English pedagogues, noting that during his undergraduate years he “used, essentially, Sheila Nelson stuff.” In addition he incorporated books by local authors as well as Suzuki books, but when he started to go to AUSTA conferences, he notes, “You just sort of have your eyes opened a bit.”
The first point of note, when observing Yoshi’s group string classes, was that he ran them at a fairly hectic pace. “You can’t [slow down] with little kids,” was his response upon being asked about the speed of delivery. Being year two [seven-year-old] students means that their limited attention span requires a lot of activities crammed into a relatively short space of time. The two lessons observed were about 35 minutes and 30 minutes in length respectively. The class size in the first instance was 17 – four cellos, and 13 violins and violas [with the participant directing from the front, and cello specialist, student practicum teacher and the school class teacher assisting]. The second class observed [six months later] included 35 students – one double bass, seven cellos, and 27 violins and violas [with the lead teacher again directing from the front, plus cello specialist and school class teacher in attendance].

The first observation was of a class later in the year, whilst the second was of a new group earlier in the following year. This meant that the second observation was of students who were about a semester less advanced than the first. Students in the class with less experience received more activities to develop basic hand techniques; the class later in the scheme of things played more pieces through. In both of the lessons a variety of activities was undertaken in close succession. The classes incorporated vocalizing of Kodaly rhythms, the singing of tunes in sol-fa [with hand signs], and stomping the beat with the feet. Students in the more experienced class were also observed clapping the rhythms whilst singing in sol-fa and simultaneously stomping the beat.

In both observations of Yoshi’s classes, the children clearly enjoyed their lessons and Yoshi, as the principal teacher, maintained the engagement of the whole group throughout the class. His manner was very affirming, as was that of the support staff. The groups of students were managed in a very inclusive way, with comments like, “At least we finished together!” underscoring the importance of participation over perfectionism. The program, being
essentially an adapted Colourstrings approach, with some Rolland activities incorporated, appeared to be received very positively by the class.

The influence of Colourstrings has had a highly significant impact upon Yoshi’s approach to group string teaching. This includes a number of visits to Finland to observe classes conducted by Kodaly/Colourstrings practitioners, and to complete a short-term teacher training course in Colourstrings. It was anticipated that interviews with the participant would reveal the overriding effect of the Scandinavian approach upon his teaching and the development of the program which he runs.

Yoshi has indeed built his group string teaching program upon Colourstrings material, but has developed customised lesson plan booklets for the students for both first and second semesters, incorporating a significant amount of original material. For each week, a detailed list of pages from the Colourstrings book to be covered and homework practice material is presented. In the first semester, content from Colourstrings book A is covered; in semester two, book B is used.

When asked about practice routines for students in the year two compulsory program, Yoshi responds, “They’ve actually got a booklet. They’ve got a little practice chart there. They probably did more practice in the first half of the year than the second half because the novelty of the new, but the support of the classroom teacher is fantastic because she just makes it part of their homework. She says, ‘You will write in your book those 10 minutes for violin.’”

Basically once they get it out, play something for 5 minutes and then put it away, there’s 10 minutes gone. But look, with the beginner stuff and the open string stuff, where you’re just getting some physical skills repeated at home you’re doing well. Little reward
system there – if they practise for four weeks they get a little lucky dip. So we’ve really tried to make it part of their curriculum. We expect them all to do it.”

Yoshi keeps the students on open strings for the first six months of the compulsory group program, using a lot of left-hand pizzicato and a lot of left-hand harmonics. Taking time on basic mechanics means that technique can be more properly established. For basic bow arm action, Yoshi comments, “We spend six months on open strings – but there’s a lovely page here about pulling and pushing, and with the idea that you’re here, and you pull all the way there, then you push it all the way back – a lot of talk about opening and closing this joint. Sometimes we even work this thing in with the grade 2 class because they do a pull and push thing in science. We try and kind of pick up on that – you know, with gravity pulling the bow down this way [vertical] and back up in the air, so lots of physical stuff…. We use lots of bow stuff in the air, if we’re doing a rhythmic song. That’s the big Rolland thing, isn’t it, the action thing? But these guys are really excited because they played in the [local] eisteddfod and actually got third prize for string orchestras, because they just did open string stuff and played it really, really well.” It is only in the latter part of the year that the students progress to stopped notes.

In terms of engendering musicality in the year two group string class, Yoshi comments, “Well I guess that with this beginner program, most of the first six months is physical technique. The second half of the year when they’re doing melodic tunes, we learn all of those as songs first, so we’re singing them, and we might sing with little echoes and things and talk about how we do louds and softs and that sort of thing. So pitch-wise they should know it aurally before they try it on their instrument, and then you can look at expressive things there... contrasting dynamics, um, so you do louds and softs. We try and talk about crescendo where there’s a quaver pattern in a particular song, where there’s a whole bar of quavers. You start it soft and you get it bigger and that kind of thing, otherwise -
you know, with a big group of beginner kids – a lot of it’s survival until they come out and do individual lessons.”

Yoshi reflects, “I think sitting in on those lessons in Finland, where you see all of the preschool children having all this pre-instrumental stuff, so all sorts of terminology and theory knowledge that kids understand, so before they even come to an instrument, they know about rhythm patterns, they know about pitch, they know about working in ensembles, and the reason why it is so successful there is that the whole school has been built around that, so they have quite extraordinary results there [the East Helsinki school music program]29, so I think I have seen enough of that there to say, there are other good results in other things around the world, but nothing quite compares with it, when it’s implemented in that way, and we only do a little version of it here, but, the fact that it covers all playing/reading/symbol system [sic], even though it’s child-centred, although it’s not black and white music, it leads to a well rounded musician who doesn’t have holes in their knowledge when they try to move on to other things.”

“I’ve seen students burnt by Suzuki programs that aren’t well taught, and then you see other places where it’s all just amazing Suzuki programs….I’ve seen…kids who think they can play amazing things but can’t read a note, [whereas Colourstrings] brings the whole thing on intangibly at the same time.”

Yoshi’s Colourstrings-based compulsory program runs with year two students [generally seven-year olds]. “When I first came here we had a year four program, so [I thought] ‘That’s stupid – let’s start in grade three,’ and then we did that for quite a few years and then when the school age came up and high school came down to year seven - which we did about three years ago here – we pushed the whole program down to year two.”

29 East Helsinki music school is the school in Finland where the Colourstrings program is centred.
Of the seventeen students that I observed in Yoshi’s compulsory 2013 year two string class [normally 24 – “quite a few away”], eight [one third of the cohort] elected to continue learning a stringed instrument with a private teacher in the post-compulsory program the following year.

“We used to [individually] do small groups of four or five, [but] we seemed to get more done... team teaching [two teachers] with the whole group [over 30 children],” Yoshi informs. Sheila Nelson (1985) noted the importance of extra teachers present using touch to help children “develop correct physical movement patterns” (p. 70). She realised further that “this is still a very important part of the large group process....Besides the group leader there will be a pianist, a cello teacher and an assistant teacher for each row of children behind the first, during the early days when a lot of handling is needed to convey physical movements. The main-teacher –plus –helpers structure, which has gradually developed, provides an ideal starting -ground for new teachers” (p. 77).

Nelson (1985) noted “class teachers who attend the string lessons, sometimes even to learn alongside the children, are an invaluable support” (p. 74). This dynamic – the involvement of the mainstream class teacher - was noted in the first observation of Yoshi’s string classes. “They’re a great class, and their classroom teacher is great too – an enormous support.” The classroom teachers have “‘learnt the ropes’, so they will adjust posture, fix shoulder rests, fix hand postures....For the previous two years [one of the classroom teachers] actually learnt violin in the class with the girls, so she participated – has an instrument, and therefore she knows a bit about it. She’s great!”

“The only downside of big group programs is that you can’t get everyone’s technique relaxed and comfortable, and you can’t expect to really...[but] there’s plenty of things happening that are good for them anyway – ‘brain gym’ – the cross-patterning of different
things with the two sides of your body – and that’s why the [class] teacher’s so supportive of it.” Yoshi agrees that working in large groups is slow going. “It is, it is. I sort of struggle, once we get on to playing melodies with fingers. Keeping technique going in a group program is very difficult. So that’s why I prefer to go on to the private or small group stuff [after the compulsory year].”

In terms of interface with parents Yoshi informs, “I always go to the parent info night at the beginning of term and kind of sell it to the parents who come in to find out what the program is up to. And particularly in first term quite a lot parents come to lessons – they’re invited to come and see what’s going on, and I encourage that too, so that they can take some responsibility.”

So far as assessment is concerned, Yoshi comments that he has “on occasion” done a little formal assessment with his group string class, “but it’s not really formulated in the primary school, which quite suits me, really. With all our instrumental students we do reports, private ones, but this is just part of their classroom program, so I’m not obliged to, no.”

After the compulsory year two group string experience, students who elect to continue pay for individual private lessons, mostly from peripatetic teachers, but Yoshi notes, “We also offer lessons in pairs and threes for a reduced rate….I try to bring them into string ensemble straight away in year three. It’s easy enough. So they have an individual lesson and an ensemble lesson.”

Yoshi takes initiative in terms of performance opportunities for his beginner string class. “We have a number of concerts so we do a concert at the end of second term; I’ve got lunch time concerts in the primary school every term, so we do three concerts a term for different age groups in the primary school. The seniors did one in second term and one in
fourth term and we did a performance as part of grandparents’ day and that sort of thing, eisteddfod...not that I'm sold on eisteddfods. It’s just quite a good place to perform. This town is completely obsessed with eisteddfods. For some schools this is the only thing they work for. It’s all about having a trophy in the cabinet [ribald laughter from both participant and researcher]. We don’t work like that, but yeah. And the eisteddfod’s been going for longer than this school has! Phenomenal – and if you dare run it down you’re a heathen!”

Yoshi is the coordinator of instrumental music in the school at which he teaches. In terms of his autonomy within the school context, Yoshi says, “Yeah, look I’m very fortunate because I have a lot of autonomy. I’m employed by the whole school, the senior school, but I work right across from primary school, junior school, middle school and senior school, and I work directly with the year two teachers about the timing of when we have lessons. I also organise a lot to do with the concert program of events for the school, so I just choose when they play, basically, so they’ll play in a lunch time concert twice a year; we’ll have a concert for all of our groups before the eisteddfod – they’ll play then – they’ll have a little go in the eisteddfod as beginners, and that’s about it.” He fairly much decides on what the level of concert programming will be from year to year. “Obviously on occasion there’s a school event where they request something, and we’ve got a big community concert in two weeks time where I’m taking my secondary symphony orchestra –type thing to represent the school down town with a whole lot of other schools – that sort of thing – ‘on demand’ sort of performance thing, but [I’m effectively running things how I want].”

In line with the philosophy of immersion, children in Yoshi’s group string teaching program receive two string lessons per week, a single class music lesson a week, as well as reinforcement in their academic classroom, depending upon the level of commitment of the class teacher. In terms of the incorporation of singing into the group string lessons, Yoshi comments, “I guess we just do the live singing thing, the vocalization, but we do have a CD
of all the songs that go with the second ABC book [Colour Strings], and I give that to the classroom teachers and they do a lot of listening to that, so that they have heard it. I give it to...our classroom music teacher and they will sing some with her.” Learning of songs vocally is done, “mostly simultaneously – yeah, yeah, um those [Colourstrings book B] CD’s have beautiful orchestral arrangements of songs as well, though, so they hear them in solfege, they hear them in solo voice, and then they hear a string orchestra arrangement with them.”

Administration of the string program that Yoshi manages is part of a fairly standard practice for school music programs. Available on the school website are the typical generic pages about the instrumental program in the school, as well as forms to sign up for the program and hire instruments. Music profiles fairly prominently in the co-curricular program offered in the school at which Yoshi teaches. The presentation of the program is clear and to the point. Again, he enjoys a very supportive school environment.

In terms of the rate of implementation of technical development in his group string classes, Yoshi reflects, “I think the longer I’ve been doing it, the slower I go, because it’s much more important to get basic things working well...and if everything’s working well and they take up private lessons, then they can accelerate much faster. That’s the only downside of big group programs is that [sic] you can’t get everyone’s technique relaxed and comfortable, and you can’t expect to really.”

Yoshi comments on the broader agenda of his teaching program: “I think we serve a role. You know, we get to an age when you [sic] have to think about things. The artistic things are what make our society - country, whatever - a civilisation. And if we think about civilisations from one – two – three thousand years ago, it’s the art and the music that we remember – and maybe the wars. They’re the ongoing things.... It’s sort of part of the
collective heritage that we have. And I think that it doesn’t hurt for kids to be educated in that and if we don’t, then all they have is the next junky pop song to be generated on someone’s computer, which, in ten minutes time it’s [sic] been forgotten. So, I think to be part of that link of an ongoing something of quality is quite a noble calling.”

Building a composite profile

Progressive approach

All of the participants in this study displayed characteristics of being attentive and considered in their approach to group string teaching. All demonstrated the capacity to self-analyse their teaching approaches and to incorporate new ideas and innovations. For each, there appears to be a sense of journey. The teachers continue to refine methods, experiment with new ideas, and show open-mindedness to being challenged about their approaches taken to group string teaching.

Participant training and development

It appears that Yoshi, who clearly demonstrated the most structured and thorough undergraduate pedagogy training of the three participants, conveys the least sense of ‘teaching how he was taught’. Strongly influenced by the committed tertiary string pedagogy lecturer, and the methods of teaching course he took during his undergraduate years, a breadth in his teaching approach is apparent from the outset. Oliver commented that, upon graduating, he did not have any idea about teaching, and was instructing on the basis of what he knew, “which was nothing about teaching.” Ann noted that when she first started teaching she “used the same approach” as she had been taught during her childhood. It was very much “trial and error.” Having some genuine grounding in methods of string teaching from the outset appears to have put Yoshi in a better position to begin his string-teaching career.
All three participants have developed a very high level of skill on their principal instrument. This corroborates with comments by experienced string teachers in Carr’s (2010) study that instrumental teachers:

must be able to actively demonstrate on their instrument….The process by which you develop high level skills on your instrument will give you worlds of insight into the pitfalls and roadblocks your students are experiencing as well as a set of methods to overcome them. (p. 71)

The ability to model characteristic musicianship qualities is necessary in developing students' basic performance skills. "It starts in their college training...a lot of their focus has to be on becoming the best musician they can be” (pp. 71-72). “If a teacher has good instruction skill but is not musically skilled, her program will suffer” (p. 78).

This study did not enter into discussion with the participants as to their proficiency or experience on stringed instruments other than their principal instrument. Both Yoshi and Ann have lower string specialists for their programs, hence the need for any expertise beyond upper strings is negated in their current situations. Oliver, on the other hand, runs heterogeneous classes single-handed. The participants in Carr’s (2010) study commented on the importance of being proficient on at least one of the bowed string instruments, but also having the ability to demonstrate the desired characteristic tone, style, and technique on all four bowed instruments.

Each of the participants had one or more highly significant string teachers during their primary and/or secondary school years. The decision to pursue string playing at a tertiary level is typically the result of the inspiration of a motivated and capable teacher during the school years (Mills & Smith, 2003; Cheng & Durrant, 2007). Apart from the inspiration received from teachers that each of the participants had during their childhood years, the
continuity and consistency that each experienced with these teachers is noteworthy. Ann was fortunate to have a series of conscientious, committed and talented teachers; Oliver had the one teacher through school that was “incredibly consistent”; Yoshi had several steady years with an inspirational teacher during his high school years.

Sustained commitment to developing teaching skills and growth in understanding of group string teaching methods was a common thread. Each commented on the highly significant impact that the Australian Strings Association had upon their development. The interface with international string pedagogues and the interaction with local colleagues have clearly impacted very favourably upon the capacity of the participants to teach group string programs. Oliver’s comment that, after his initial years of teaching, he felt the need for some professional development, broadening, and fresh ideas, somewhat encapsulates the persuasion of each of the participants.

Materials and methods

The participants working in private schools had more autonomy with regards to teaching materials than their state-school counterpart. Whilst Education Queensland places certain limitations upon Oliver’s choice of tutors and methods, nevertheless he operates, as do the others, with considerable autonomy, in the developmental sequence and technique-building approach he takes with his classes.

Since the development of significant teaching material is a characteristic of the work of the notable international string pedagogues cited in this dissertation, it is most interesting to observe that two of the participants have written their own tutor books assimilating their own pedagogical ideas into material suited to the contexts in which they have taught, or are

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30 The “Instrumental Music Program Policy”, issued by the Queensland Education Department (1996), states, “For program conformity, the same text should be selected on an area basis.”
currently teaching. The third participant, Yoshi, has built his program upon the Colourstrings material, but has developed lesson plan booklets customised for his own situation, incorporating a significant amount of original material. To produce fully-fledged teaching materials requires considerable time, energy and commitment.

Interestingly, American group string tutors receive limited use by the participants in this study. American tutors are not used at all by Yoshi. After year two children graduate from the beginner group program, they move into individual lessons [some groups of two] where a variety of material, e.g. AMEB [Australian Music Examinations Board] resources, is used by one-to-one tutors. Apart from the use of one of the American method books [with “brilliant orchestral backing tracks”] to teach open strings in the beginning group class program, Ann admitted, “I don’t use those books…I don’t use that sequence at all. I think it goes from the open strings and everything into the all fingers down approach, and I, as I said, I don’t use that, so pretty much after that open string stuff in the beginning I don’t really use that book except for extension materials occasionally, except for some of our tutors [teachers] we use it for private students, just, you know, to help with a bit of structure for their sessions or what have you, but really it’s the backing tracks.” Because of Education Queensland curriculum requirements, Oliver progresses from his self-developed tutor book to one of the prescribed31 American group string tutors.

All three participants have built into their programs a diversity of material, not just the one tutor method to which they religiously adhere. For Ann it was the inclusion of pieces from Stephen Chin’s ‘Thirty Concert Pieces’32, as well as material from Encore on Strings33. For Yoshi it was the use of his own material in addition to the Colourstrings program, leading on to AMEB and other resources beyond the initial compulsory group-string-class year. For

32 Thirty Concert Pieces (2000), by Brisbane string teacher and composer, Stephen Chin, is published by ‘Everything String’.
33 Encore on Strings, published in two volumes (in 2003 & 2005), is authored by Keith and Natalie Sharp under the ‘Encore’ label established by Mark Gibson. It is published by Music House String Publications.
Oliver it is the passage from his self-developed tutor material to familiar tunes and then the prescribed American string tutor books. This correlates with Nelson’s approach where teachers in her Tower Hamlets program were encouraged to use materials outside of those generated for that initiative (Nelson, 1985).

Singing features in the string programs of all participants, to varying degrees, though to a much greater degree in the private schools where team teaching and a greater level of ‘immersion’ is possible. Yoshi’s Colourstrings-based approach with the group class involves singing and playing of the tunes concurrently. His students were also observed using the Kodaly pitch hand signs as they sang sol-fa tunes in the classes. Students in Ann’s whole-group beginner string ensemble rehearsal were observed singing through the song that they were preparing for presentation at the forthcoming end-of-semester concert.

The significance of singing in group string programs was underscored as a part of the overall training package in Nelson’s (1985) curriculum, where students were required to first sing the pieces before taking them home to practise, hence the emphasis on singing during lessons. “Successful experiments have recently been made with combinations of Kodaly and pre-string lessons” (p.72).

All three participants use the aid of backing tracks or keyboard accompaniments to support their group string teaching endeavours, and to broaden the overall musical experience for the children. “I use the keyboard in the lessons because you can turn anything into something that sounds like music, I think, if you use the keyboard,” Oliver notes. Whilst working mostly with the stringed instruments themselves, Yoshi used the piano on occasion in his lessons to accompany pieces that the students had mastered. Ann, having limited keyboard skills, incorporates different material into her program, not only the backing CDs to her own tutor materials, but also “crazy backing tracks” and brilliant orchestral
accompanying CDs from other publications to assist the lesson dynamic. This correlates with the findings of Bergonzi (1997) who notes that “overall musicianship improved with students using recorded harmonic accompaniments – playing with accompaniments is motivational for beginners because it becomes a musical experience rather than just a technical one” (in Barnes 2003, p. 5).

When asking Ann about the ‘auditory assault’ experienced day in, day out, she responded, “That’s where partly, also quite selfishly, the open strings [in her tutor books and materials used] come from – it softens the blow!” “Um, backing tracks as well – turn ‘em up loud!” Oliver’s response to the constant insecure intonation and poor tone quality typical of beginner string classes was that he had always been able to cope pretty well. “I think if you can’t cope with that, you can’t do the job – not for the long term, anyway.” Patience, in the face of auditory adversity, was observed in the classes of all three teachers.

**Skill-building: technique, reading, theory**

Each of the participants had a significant emphasis on the development of technique in their classes. Participants, and their assistants, used physical contact with students to shape and correct playing technique. This physical contact with students is a notable aspect of Szilvay’s teaching approach, and also of the Nelson mode, with assistants in the group lessons physically aiding student posture and technique.

The participants from non-government schools, having established programs, which incorporate team teaching, have other string specialists in their classes physically assisting children with playing posture. More than that, Yoshi and Ann both have the advantage of a lower strings specialist to assist with large group lessons and rehearsals. “We used to do small groups of four or five, [but] we seemed to get more done…team teaching with the whole group,” recounts Yoshi. Due to the current nature of the administration of programs in
government schools, Oliver has no opportunity for team-teaching within the individual schools in which he works. Oliver played recorded keyboard backings for the tutor materials he uses in his classes to allow him to migrate around the room and physically help students with aspects of their technique.

Music reading is of importance to all three participants. For Yoshi and Oliver, whose programs connect strongly with the Colourstrings model, reading is integral to the method. Similarly, Ann, with her Nelson-inspired approach, incorporates music reading from the outset. All three teachers introduce the four strings from the outset and the reading of notes associated with each string. Although reading music [and the necessary playing of specific music notes] was a significant priority, the teachers were all very aware of the importance of building good technique as a foundational asset upon which to build skill and ensure subsequent progress.

The inclusion of music theory, from the music score being learnt, was a common thread between all participants. This was particularly noticeable in Ann’s ensemble rehearsal where, on a number of occasions, she quizzed the boys on things like dynamics and terminology, e.g. the difference between melody rhythm and ostinato rhythm. Oliver has incorporated music theory sheets into his own method book to teach note recognition commensurate with the pieces and exercises being studied.

**Teaching space and student management**

Space is managed effectively in the case of all three participants, but class size has a bearing on the level of formality in the layout. Both Yoshi and Ann teach in large classroom spaces, suitable for up to as many as forty students. In Ann’s classes, students are all seated in rows of about eight. For the ensemble rehearsal, basses are at the back, cellos in the front, with violins and violas in between. A grand piano is situated to one side of the room, whilst
instrument storage racks run along the back wall and the other side. Instrument cases for the students in the ensemble rehearsal are left against the walls in the hallway immediately outside the rehearsal/tuition room. In the group lessons, Yoshi has all violinists and violists standing, with their cases on the floor beside them. The cellists and bassist sit at the front of the space – their cases are towards the back of the classroom. An upright piano is located to one side at the front of the room.

Oliver’s teaching space is much smaller, large enough to have a maximum of about ten students. Children playing violins and violas stand, with their cases behind them. The lower string players sit. An electric keyboard is situated in the middle at the front of the room. With smaller numbers, students are not noticeably assigned to rows, but tend to find their own spaces. The set-up allows the teacher to easily migrate around the room.

Each of the practitioners demonstrated the capacity to work with heterogeneous groupings. Oliver, as a sole-operator, was observed teaching heterogeneous groups exclusively. Ann taught homogenous groupings with her smaller classes, but managed the large heterogeneous group with the support of the lower strings specialist. Yoshi was only observed directing large heterogeneous string classes, again with the support of the lower strings specialist and other staff.

**Routines and regimes**

One very clear consensus held by all participants is with respect to the pace of development in the teaching of foundational technique to beginner students. “*If you want them playing well in high school, the groundwork has to be done so carefully,*” reflects Oliver. Yoshi’s comment, “*The longer I do it, the slower I go*”, supports Oliver’s mindset. Ann likewise noted, “*The big change is taking things slower with my students.*” She noted that staying within a particular phase of development was important, and repeating
techniques “in as many different ways” as possible, was important in establishing children’s foundational technique.

Przygocki (2004) concurs with Oliver’s mindset in advocating for “string players in their first year of study… [achieving] an excellent basic technical setup” (p. 44). We recall his comment, noted earlier, that an “excellent technical and musical foundation after the first two years will enable students to begin acquiring intermediate level skills, such as extensions, shifting, vibrato, and the ability to play in a variety of keys”. Effectively, where students are not given a solid foundational technique in the early years, there is little chance of significant advancement.

Of interest to this research is the consistency in the group tuition classes of all observed situations [except one of Yoshi’s classes] being between 35 and 45 minutes in duration. The extra time [above and beyond the apparent fairly standard half hour\(^{34}\)] appeared advantageous, and indeed necessary, for adequate learning to occur. For Yoshi and Ann, the lesson time represents half of the 70-minute time period allocated for standard school lessons. For Oliver, the 45 minute lessons for his beginner classes were a time-frame negotiated with the teachers and administration of the school. Ensemble rehearsals typically run for approximately 60 minutes.

Students in the group string programs of all three cases receive multiple weekly music experiences in their programs. Oliver’s students receive a weekly, heterogeneous small group lesson and [from the second year of tuition] an ensemble rehearsal with him, as well a weekly generic music class with the school music specialist. Ann’s students receive a weekly small group lesson [divided into upper and lower strings], a whole group ensemble rehearsal, as well as a general music class taken by her. Yoshi’s year two students receive a large

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\(^{34}\) The “Memorandum of Agreement” (2006) between the Department of Education and Arts and the Queensland Teachers’ Union states, “In primary schools the length of a regular weekly instrumental music lesson should be a minimum of 30 minutes.”
heterogeneous group string lesson, a small group string lesson [divided into upper and lower strings], as well as a general class music lesson. Beyond this, the general class teacher reinforces musical concepts learnt as part of the overall mainstream academic class program. Interestingly Nelson (1985) noted that important developments in her program were “the introduction of a regular second lesson each week in a smaller group to allow reinforcement of the content of the big group lesson” (p. 73), with violin lessons “programming violin lessons into the school timetable” (p. 74). This endorses the participants’ approach to multiple weekly interactions with their group string class students.

‘Immersion’ is a key concept in two of the three participants’ group string teaching scenarios. There tends to be greater distinction between instrumental specialists and class music teachers in Education Queensland schools, which means that there is less chance of integration between string classes and general music classes. Nevertheless, the point of similarity is in the multiple lesson and ensemble training experience that all of the practitioners offer to their students. In the private school sector, an individual lesson or small group lesson plus ensemble experience plus mainstream music class make up the package. In the state system, there is a similar package, though there appears less likelihood of the string program and the mainstream music classes having a sense of integration. The distinction between instrumental specialists and class music teachers in Education Queensland schools is the status quo, so that, for the most part, programs in any one school do not overlap, in terms of content and process.

**Students and sustainability**

Yoshi’s Colourstrings-based compulsory program runs with year two students [generally 7-year olds]. Oliver begins his group classes in year three [generally 8-year olds], in compliance with the earliest starting age nominated in Education Queensland guidelines.
Whilst these guidelines do no prevent students starting at a later age, timetabling and curriculum issues effectively prevent him from beginning students in higher grades. Ann teaches at an all-boys school, which commences with year five students, hence, her program starting with ten-year-olds.

This variety of starting age is consistent with the varied international approaches. In considering the best starting age for students in their program, Nelson and her team decided, “7-8 year-olds seemed to provide the most advantages...but some successful experiments have been made in taking the 6-year-olds for singing and rhythm games leading gradually into string playing" (Nelson 1985, p.72). Lamb and Cook (2002) suggest that “nine is a reasonable age for students to begin – they have adjusted to school routine, have settled study habits, and are physically, emotionally and mentally mature enough to cope with the demands of learning a stringed instrument” (p. 149). Suggested starting ages by these international pedagogues reinforce the general range of ages students begin in the programs run by the participants in this study. The Suzuki Talent Education system normally begins students at three to four years of age\textsuperscript{35}, but these early programs are run independent of standard government primary schooling.

Of the two participants whose programs are compulsory for students at particular school year levels, about 30% of students continue past the initial compulsory phase. Because Oliver undertakes fairly careful screening of students entering the program in year 3, he notes that the attrition rate is “not huge in the primary schools.” Oliver noted that students who stayed in the program for the first couple of years tended to stay on beyond that. Yoshi commented that “some cannibalization” [attrition of string students] occurred when the band instrument option came on line in year four at the school where he teaches. Yoshi had a sense that the string program across the whole school had reached ‘critical mass’ so that attrition in

\textsuperscript{35} International Suzuki Association
the early years did not present as much of a concern. Ann noted the difficulty experienced in sustaining a program across the divide between junior and middle school. Because of the relatively late starting age for the boys, and the two-year compulsory group-string program, she was aware of the issues impacting the levels of attrition. Nelson noted the difficulty in maintaining student involvement in the group string program across the transition from primary to high school.

Oliver opts to transfer a reasonable, but not ‘high-flying’ violinist across to double bass, and uses small ‘scholarships’ to attract violinists to learn viola. Yoshi, commenting on the assignment of students to lower strings, notes, “We don’t have a very thorough policy on that. We tend to try and let those who are very keen to do a specific instrument, let them do that. We only have a restricted number of instruments for a start, and that seems to have worked quite well. Often if there’s more that want to play the cello that we have cellos for, then we ‘sell’ viola to them – ‘and this one has the same strings – like a little brother to the cello – hey, you can play this one and be with the same team.’ Bass students you normally have to be a bit careful about because you want them to take it on board. You need the physical support of the parents [to transport the instrument].” There was no discussion with Ann regarding her policy for assigning students to lower strings.

In keeping with Yoshi and Oliver’s thinking about who to assign to instruments other than the violin, Nelson (1985) developed upper and lower string breadth by “selecting cellos players carefully after a week or two [of class instruction], not solely on the basis of size or potential, but from some research into preference for, and ability to differentiate lower tones” (p. 74). This would appear to confirm the importance of due consideration as to who to place on lower stringed instruments in class string programs.
**Flexibility and adaptability**

Oliver circumvents potential attrition by maintaining a certain level of flexibility with student attendance at lessons and rehearsals, particularly in the secondary school. Oliver notes, “I try and be reasonably flexible because I find particularly once you get into senior high school if you’re not flexible, you lose your kids.” Herein is a part of the answer to the attrition issue. Yoshi demonstrates considerable flexibility with the pacing of his group string program. “Last year’s (2013) group [was] really able. A lot of them had four fingers on by the end of the year. But I don’t think this year’s lot will – so we’ll just take our time.”

One quality noted in all of the participants was the ability to adapt their teaching approaches to the different circumstances in which they find themselves. Ann made comment that she adjusted the content of her own tutor method, and the style of instruction [for example, early childhood versus ten-year-old boys] to the teaching circumstance in which she found herself. Yoshi, with his strongly Colourstrings-based group program for the year two program at the girls’ school where he teaches, broadens the base of materials beyond the mandatory phase into the elective instrumental tuition program. Oliver was eager to transplant both the community dimension of music making in Scandinavia, and the principles of Colourstrings, into the Queensland context.

The level of trial and error appears to be one point of discrepancy between the three research participants. “My experimenting, my training…a lot of it, though, has been…trial and error. I have done a lot of my own research, but it hasn’t been formal and I haven’t got any accreditation for that,” reflects Ann. “You just try all sorts of stuff,” comments Oliver, when asked about his approach to beginner bow grip development. As noted in Yoshi’s individual participant profile, he received the most extensive undergraduate string pedagogy training, which meant that his was a more directed passage through the mire of methods and
approaches to string teaching. In effect, his early breadth of training in string teaching pedagogy appears to have circumvented the ‘hit-and-miss’ approach of many early career string teachers.

**Teacher-student-parent interaction**

During lesson observations of all participants, student behavioural difficulties were inconsequential. The manner of the teachers was courteous and gracious during observed lessons. None of the participants seemed driven by perfectionist agendas. Whilst performance outcomes were clearly important to the teachers, children were treated with respect, and given priority over product. Thompson (1984) notes “human interaction…characterizes teaching in groups and gives it its strength” (p. 153).

Although personality traits of group string teachers are somewhat difficult to quantify, one notable characteristic of all of the participants in this study is their general calmness and patience towards the children in their classes. Yoshi’s more frenetic pace of delivery was still couched within a relaxed and positive classroom environment.

As a point of distinction between the participants, the pace of delivery and dynamic of the observed lessons varied. This appeared more the result of diversity in teacher personality rather than in the planning of instructional approaches. The manner of each of the practitioners was quite different in a number of ways – speaking volumes were different; the level of animation of the three teachers varied; and the amount of content covered during the lessons varied from teacher to teacher.

Each of the participant teachers demonstrated a clear sense of leadership, whether it was in a fairly demonstrative way or via a more calm and steady approach. Carr (2010) noted
the importance of leadership, whereby the teacher engages others to join him or her “to do things for you, with you, because of you” (p. 27).

Some of the group string teacher characteristics outlined by Thompson (1984), which are evident in the teaching approach of the participants in the current research include the ability to involve all students at all times, the capacity to manage heterogeneous groups, the generation of own teaching material, and the encouragement of cross-learning [peer-learning].

Another area of overlap between the three participants is in the area of positive interface with parents and carers of the children in their programs. There is a high level of communication with parents and caregivers, not just in written form, but also face-to-face interaction. Communication on a personal level occurs frequently at the various concerts and performances in which the students are involved. An explanation of the program, the teaching approach, and expectations are communicated during these types of events. “At concerts I’ll usually give a little spiel to the parents about what they’re doing and why this sounds like it does,” says Oliver. Ann explains the program at the parent information evening at the beginning of the year, and gives an outline of what is expected of the students, practice requirements, and the like. Yoshi likewise attends the parent information night to communicate with “the parents who come in to find out what the program is [about], and particularly in the first term, quite a lot of parents come to the lessons – they’re invited to see what’s going on...so they can take some responsibility [for their children’s involvement].”

Written communication involves letters regarding the program as a whole, then specific communiqués regarding things like purchasing instruments, expectations of students and parents and caregivers, ensemble rehearsals and the like. Beyond written communication and parent-teacher interaction at school events, participants clearly make themselves readily
available for individual consultation regarding the students, the programs, and the requirements thereof.

All of the participants detail some sort of practice expectations of the students in their group string classes. Ann, working with ten-year-old boys, recommends three or four practices of about fifteen minutes each week. Yoshi’s student booklet – a curriculum document - has a section at the bottom of each weekly lesson page for children to record up to five practices [5 to 10 minutes each] per week. Oliver’s thermometer has provision for seven practices per week, but he encourages the beginning students towards a minimum of three practices [5 to 10 minutes each] per week to get into the ‘healthy’ zone.

All three practitioners gave informal feedback during lessons and ensemble rehearsals observed by the researcher. The nature of this feedback included verbal commendation of proper technique and positive playing, as well a formative feedback [both through physical assistance and verbal cues] on points of technique. Yoshi is not required to summatively assess and report on student progress in his group string program. Full academic reports are completed for Education Queensland students at the end of each semester, and Oliver includes a grade for both effort and achievement as well as a short anecdotal comment for each student on these reports. Ann uses a generic criteria-based instrumental music report which is used for all students in the compulsory group instrumental program, both strings and band. A corresponding A-E grade and a written statement outlining what they have done in classes during the group instrumental program are published in students’ end-of-semester academic report cards.

**Student performance opportunities and outcomes**

It is noteworthy that all three participants spend significant amounts of time ‘above and beyond the call of duty’ to generate and refine their own materials. Oliver has spent
significant amounts of time not only working on his own tutor method, but also in writing string ensemble music suitable for young players. Ann spends holiday time putting together workbooks, as well as writing her own tutor materials. During vacation time, Yoshi has significant involvement in the endeavours of the string fraternity on a national level. During the data collection phase of this research, he was busy administering vacation string-teacher workshops and string student vacation programs.

Ann’s college provides a significant number of performance opportunities across the school year. One of the main focal points is a large, combined-schools’ weekend music festival. Yoshi has a large program of performances that includes lunchtime concerts, other school concerts, as well as performances out in the wider community. Even the year two beginner group string class is involved.

Oliver, working for Education Queensland, has an expected quota of performances for the groups in each school at which he teaches. These typically include end-of-semester concerts, workshops, and competitions.

One disconcerting feature noted in the comments of both Yoshi and Oliver is the greater importance, placed by schools, on success in competitive musical environments. Oliver seemed quite disturbed by the pressure some schools place upon success in competitions. Where once a school might participate, without much concern for the outcome, more recently schools have become much more concerned about results. “Now they almost vet your group before they let you go in...Some schools are getting very, very picky...and really expecting to see results.” As a consequence, there is pressure to tailor the program “to do well in a test, teaching them to do well in a competition.”

36 The “Memorandum of Agreement” (2006) between the Department of Education and Arts and the Queensland Teachers’ Union states, “The maximum time requirements for incidental duties performed by Music Teachers/Instructors will be: (a) performance outside rostered duty time 20 performances per year [for full-time staff, normally working across several schools]; (b) music camp attendance – Equivalent of 5 days per year (including week-end rehearsals); (c) parent/student recruitment and selection and parental support committee meetings – 8 per year in total”
Yoshi commented on involvement in the local eisteddfod’ – “not that I’m sold on eisteddfods – it’s just quite a good place to perform. This town is completely obsessed with eisteddfods. For some schools this is the only thing they work for. It’s all about having a trophy in the cabinet! We don’t work like that.”

Beyond music

One of the most interesting aspects of all three participants is the extra-musical dimension to the group string programs which each of them runs. Whilst the community dimension of music-making is particularly important for Oliver, the beauty of the art and the metacognitive backdrop are highly significant to Ann’s teaching process. Yoshi is cognisant of his contribution to the collective heritage of the civilisation which has been handed down to us, and the nobility of being a part of that link.

Figure 1 below provides a tabular representation of the composite profile of the participants, noting points of similarity and points of distinction between the individual profiles of each. Where all three participants have a similar approach, the attribute is placed in the ‘Points of Similarity’ column. Where all three have different approach, the attribute is placed in the ‘Points of Total Distinction’ column. Where two have the same response, and the third participant differs, the teaching facet is placed in the ‘Mixed Responses’ column.

This visual representation gives an indication of the degree of overlap and the degree of divergence between participants at the collective profile level. It is clear that the points of convergence between the individual participants far outweigh the differences between them.
**POINTS OF TOTAL DISTINCTION between all participants**
Teacher personalities – impact upon pace of delivery, level of animation of teacher and class; Starting age of students (externally imposed by school situations for two of the participants); Pacing of lessons reflected teacher personalities

**MIXED RESPONSES from participants**
Undergraduate string pedagogy training: positive experience for one participant; inadequate for two participants
Teaching how the participant was taught – the experience of two participants – the journey towards current approaches involved a significant amount of trial and error
Level of autonomy – private school totally allowed for autonomous approach to group string teaching; Education Queensland employee had less autonomy; Two of the participants have written their own tutor books;
Pedagogical approach – two with Colourstrings and one with English approach
Singing as part of the program with two participants; Team teaching the chosen approach for the two teachers where the option was available; Immersion policy involving group string program, ensemble and music class; Lower string appointments – two of the participants had no policy; A mix of formal and informal approaches to assessment and feedback; Teaching space – two large, one small – determined by, and determining of, class sizes;

**POINTS OF SIMILARITY between all participants**
High level skill base of teacher; High level of teacher motivation; Initiative in generating teaching materials;
Significance of participants’ own teachers at school;
Significant impact of professional development, particularly the impact of AUSTA;
Significant amount of autonomy given to all participants in the varied school contexts;
Breadth and diversity of materials used, not just a single method, even where participants have devised their own;
Use of teaching aids – keyboard and/or backing CD’s in classes; Physical contact with students to correct technique;
Music reading a priority; Effective management of teaching space; Ability to manage homogenous and heterogeneous groupings;
Slow and steady rate for the development of student skills; Length of classes greater than 30 minutes;
Frequency of lessons and rehearsals – multiple weekly interactions: group string lesson, ensemble, music class;
High level of student retention beyond beginner programs; Flexibility in terms of teaching materials and approach;
Practice routines established; significant performance opportunities given to participants’ student ensembles;
Behaviour management exemplary; Positive interaction with parents/caregivers and students;
Extra-musical dimensions – viewing group string instruction beyond immediate skill acquisition;
Patience, Leadership

*Figure 1. Convergence and divergence of participant attributes*
**Group instrumental teaching and professional standards for teaching**

It is important to maintain in our purview points of corroboration between the competencies demonstrated by the teachers participating in this study and the standards for proficiency in teaching as listed by bodies such as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT). Do the AITSL Australian Teachers Professional Standards translate directly as a set of competencies for group string teachers? To what degree do the composite skills, knowledge and attributes of the participants align with these standards? Are there gaps between the collective profile of the participants and the professional standards delineated? Is there a unique sub-set of competencies by which group string teachers can be identified, and which are not included in the QCT and AITSL standards?

The seven standards mandated by AITSL, and replicated by the QCT, are grouped into three domains with sub-sets:

*Professional knowledge*

1. Know students and how they learn.
2. Know the content and how to teach it.

*Professional practice*

3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning.
4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments.
5. Assess, provide feedback and reporting on student learning.
Professional engagement


7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

The AITSL professional standards for teachers are organised into four developmental categories: graduate, proficient, highly accomplished, and lead (AITSL National Professional Standards for Teachers, 2014). The participants in this study will be nominated as “highly accomplished”. “Highly accomplished” teachers are defined as those who are highly effective classroom practitioners and are able to work independently and collaboratively to improve their own teaching practice and the practice of colleagues. They “have in-depth knowledge of subjects and curriculum content”. Consideration will be given now to the points of alignment and discrepancies between the collective profile and the AITSL standards.

Domain 1: Professional knowledge

As mid-career group string teachers, the collective profile reflects, at the highly accomplished level, the first of the Australian Teachers Professional Standards, “Know students and how they learn”. Physical, social and intellectual development of students is confidently managed through the selection of “flexible and effective” teaching strategies to suit the students in the group string program.

As a consequence of individual research, as well as workplace knowledge, the collective profile of the practitioners reflects an understanding of how students learn. In some respects music transcends cultural barriers, such that the collective profile for the group string teachers in this study has minimal interface with diversities of linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. Since the programs of all three participants are inclusive, rather than exclusive, the only barriers of any note relate to the suitability, or otherwise, of an
orchestral stringed instrument as the appropriate study for children involved in the program. Not all students are suited to string playing, as noted earlier in the selection process for Oliver’s students.

Whilst no students observed by the researcher appeared to have obvious disability, the collective profile augers well for the inclusion of a wide range of capacity amongst students in the group classes observed, with individual needs being attended to, particularly where team-teaching approaches have been adopted.

Any inadequate alignment of the collective profile with standard one of the Professional Standards relates to the early years in which each participant worked as a group string teacher. Only one of the participants in this study received substantial undergraduate training in string pedagogy. The process of knowing students and how they learn appears to have been acquired largely “on the job” by the other two participants over a protracted period of time. Limited tertiary preparation for group string teaching is apparent in the collective experience of these two of the practitioners, albeit their tertiary careers occurred over twenty years ago. Enhanced initial teacher education in group instrumental teaching, as well as programmed mentoring in the early teaching years, appears to have been lacking.

As a collective group of practitioners, a highly accomplished level was apparent for the second AITSL standard, “Know the content and how to teach it”. Two of the three participants acted as team leaders in the larger group teaching situations. In this respect, colleagues were supported in the use of content knowledge and teaching strategies to implement effective teaching and learning. Since all three participants have developed individualised or effectively adapted methods, the collective profile corroborates with the dimension of exhibiting “innovative practice” in the selection of content and delivery of it. Again, interface with culturally diverse student groups is transcended by the universal nature
of musical language. Literacy and numeracy, as they are incorporated into the reading of Western music notation, is part of the collective profile.

Apart from audio recordings and keyboard accompaniment, electronic and digital media, including ICT, were not used by any of the practitioners. The organic nature of learning stringed instrument precludes the necessity for this, but does not exclude its use by practitioners outside the confines of this study.

As regards the early careers of the study participants, content knowledge prior to embarking on group string teaching likewise appears scant for the two participants who lacked undergraduate training in group string teaching methods. In the light of the second professional standard, two of the three participants, after graduating, demonstrated limited understanding of the content knowledge of group string teaching. These two teachers began their teaching careers using the same materials with which they had learnt themselves, “teaching how they were taught” and using “trial and error” to construct their approaches. Both admitted to having very limited knowledge as to how to teach, and how to engage in the process of transferring skills and understandings in the string class setting. As a consequence of insufficient undergraduate training specific to professional knowledge, planning for effective teaching and learning was limited. The third participant, as a result of substantial undergraduate training in string teaching methods, appeared more readily able to engage students in the learning process within the group setting, at the outset of his career.

Domain 2: Professional practice

Alignment with the third AITSL standard, “Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning,” was demonstrated by all three participants at this mid-point in their careers, through well-honed teaching materials, personalised approaches, and effective planning for the teaching and learning process in the group instrumental setting. Implementation of
planning, in all three cases, was effective, but again, two of the three participants admitted to this being the outcome of trial and error, experimenting with different teaching strategies, and gradually finding resolution.

Expectation that the children will learn via “modeling and setting challenging learning goals” was clearly evident. However, no substantial evidence of participants working collaboratively on planning, evaluation and modifying of teaching programs was observed or documented. Even participants involved in team-teaching situations demonstrated minimal, if any collaborative planning or evaluation, and as such could not really be placed against the third AITSL standard.

There is significant corroboration between the collective participant profile and the fourth AITSL professional standard, “Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments.” All three practitioners modeled effective practice in the group lessons and ensemble rehearsals observed, demonstrating care on both a practical and personal level for all of the children in their classes. Where team teaching situations occurred, the participants demonstrated the capacity to support colleagues in the management and engagement of all students in the class.

Challenging behaviour management issues did not present in any of the observed classes or ensemble rehearsals. Since all students were engaged for the vast majority of the class time, occasion for disruptive behaviour was minimised.

Learning environments were well managed by all three participants in the group lessons and ensemble rehearsals observed, with clear guidelines given to students, in terms of instrument case storage and class protocols. In some classes, upper string students stood for their lesson; in other settings all students sat. Management of the teaching and learning space
was effective – student instrument cases, for example, were stored in non-hazardous places, e.g. outside the classroom, or behind students.

Perhaps the weakest alignment of the professional standards and the collective participant profile is in the area of assessment and feedback. The fifth standard, “Assess, provide feedback and reporting on student learning” appears to be the most ad hoc dimension of the teaching and learning process in the group string programs observed by the researcher. The Professional Standards descriptor for highly accomplished teachers, “Develop and apply a comprehensive range of assessment strategies to diagnose learning needs, comply with curriculum requirements and support colleagues to evaluate the effectiveness of their approaches to assessment”, was largely unapparent during in situ observations and after perusal of documents. For all three participants, assessment was mostly informal, with no formal examination of individual students occurring in any of the group string programs observed. There was variation between the participants in the level of formal reporting of student progress, from none, to anecdotal end-of-semester reports including grades for effort, achievement and behaviour.

For all three participants, there was a significant amount of informal feedback provided during the group lessons observed. Feedback was verbal – affirmative, corrective, explanatory, and physical – actual hands-on remediation of technical problems. The learning of music and the subtleties of good musicianship have a strong qualitative element. Whilst formal assessment may be a viable option in a group string-teaching program, to achieve accuracy both at a subjective and objective level necessitates some degree of one-to-one interaction. This would have logistical implications for classroom management.

The use of student assessment material “for evaluating learning and teaching, identifying interventions and modifying teaching practice” was very much in the domain of
each of the three practitioners, but apparently only in terms of self-assessment and modification. Even those involved in team-teaching situations did not allude to any adjustment to their teaching practice on the basis of collegial interaction in their immediate teaching environment. Modification of teaching practice occurred for all three participants as a result of external interactions and professional development.

Domain 3: Professional engagement

As motivated teachers, the collective profile shows a commitment to engage in professional learning. Strong corroboration is evident between the collective profile and Professional Standards six and seven - “Engage in professional learning” and “Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/careers and the community.” All three participants demonstrated sustained and committed engagement with professional learning, and with the professional string teaching community which acts as the main conduit for that professional knowledge. This learning has occurred via professional bodies not directly associated with tertiary teacher-training institutions or centralised education departments. Conferences, summer schools, and the like, organised by these professional organisations, have serviced professional development needs for all three participants. Engagement with colleagues has been largely the initiative of the participants on a casual, rather than formal, basis. For two of the practitioners, this professional development was the most significant aspect of their growth as group string teachers and underpinned the improved correlation of their individual profiles with the other professional standards. For the third participant, Yoshi, engagement with the professional string teaching fraternity occurred during his tertiary-student years and has continued ever since.

Yoshi’s involvement in the organisation of a national strings symposium towards the end of the observation period for this research aligns with the highly accomplished descriptor
to “initiate and engage in professional discussion with colleagues in a range of forms to evaluate practice directed at improving professional knowledge and practice, and the educational outcomes of students.” The other participants’ involvement at executive and committee levels with AUSTA also equates with the highly accomplished teacher profile outlined in the sixth of the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

The participants in this study cater for offering “quality placements for pre-service teachers” in a sporadic way. One of the participants had a pre-service teacher involved in observed lessons. There was no direct supervision of the pre-service teacher’s participation during the class activities undertaken.

The maintenance of “high ethical standards” and the exercise of “sound judgments in all school community contexts” are clearly observable in the teaching practices of all three participants. One of the participants, Ann, who took on a temporary head of department role during the observation period for this study, was observed incidentally supporting colleagues “to review and interpret legislative, administrative, and organizational requirements, policies and processes.” This was evident in her management of the end-of-semester school concert, which profiled the breadth of the College performance music program, not just the string department.

Engagement with parents and carers within the respective schools of each of the teachers appeared well-progressed, professional, yet relaxed. Interface with parents and carers, and the wider community, has occurred as an on-the-job learning experience, rather than a pre-trained one. All three practitioners have clearly demonstrated contributions “to professional networks and associations” and the building of “productive links with the wider community to improve teaching and learning”. All of the participants have taken initiative in engaging their string programs with the wider community, e.g. Oliver, with his regional
youth orchestra; Ann, with her annual interschool gala music weekend; and Yoshi with his senior orchestra involvement in a local community fund-raising event.

A brief summary of the interface between the collective profile and the AITSL standards is shown below in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Australian Teachers Professional Standards</th>
<th>Composite Profile for Group String Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional knowledge</td>
<td>Standard 1 Know students and how they learn</td>
<td>Clear understanding of how students learn; largely learnt ‘on the job’ over a protracted period of time; limited tertiary preparation is evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard 2 Know the content and how to teach it</td>
<td>Innovative practice in the selection and delivery of content is apparent; content knowledge prior to embarking on group string teaching is mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td>Standard 3 Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning</td>
<td>Effective planning for, and implementation of, the teaching and learning process is evident; this was limited in the early teaching years, where participants were approaching group instruction with a largely ‘trial and error’ approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard 4 Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments</td>
<td>Learning environments were well managed in the group lessons observed; inclusive strategies were used to engage and support all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard 5 Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning</td>
<td>Assessing and reporting, and providing feedback on student learning appears to be the most ad hoc aspect of the teaching-learning process; informal feedback was seen as a constant part of the teaching-learning process; there is considerable variance in the level of formal assessment and reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional engagement</td>
<td>Standard 6 Engage in professional learning</td>
<td>Commitment to engage in professional learning has occurred via professional bodies not directly associated with conventional tertiary teacher-training institutions, as an independent initiative of the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard 7 Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community</td>
<td>Engagement with colleagues has been largely the initiative of the participants on a casual, rather than formal, basis; engagement with parents/carers and the community at large occurred as an on-the-job learned experience, rather than a pre-trained one</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In considering the situation in Queensland, anomalies are apparent in the requirements for the employment of instrumental teachers in schools. The Music Resource Centre for Education Queensland (n.d.) states:
While the Queensland College of Teachers does not demand Teacher Registration for Instrumental teachers, Education Queensland, as an employer, requires appropriate teaching qualifications. These include; [sic] any program for study recognised by the Queensland College of Teachers for registration as a teacher, (e.g. Bachelor of Education, Graduate Diploma of Education) with suitable specialisation; as well as the following approved programs of study: University of Queensland Master of Music (with instrumental music teaching subjects)…Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University Graduate Diploma of Music Studies - Instrumental Music.…For permanency as an Instrumental Teacher an applicant needs appropriate music and teaching qualifications.

Applicants for instrumental teaching positions (including teachers who wish to transfer to instrumental music) need an Instrumental Music Proficiency Assessment in addition to any other teaching assessment.

The Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) Instrumental Music Proficiency Assessment states, “Any person appointed to a permanent or temporary position at a school must possess current registration as a teacher with the Queensland College of Teachers or [emphasis added] a current ‘Working with Children’ check (Blue Card).” This is in contradistinction with the QCT requirement that:

For teacher registration purposes in Queensland, the ‘Graduate’ Standards are the benchmark for those completing initial teacher education programs and applying for provisional registration. Teachers progressing to full registration or renewing their full registration must meet the Professional Standards at the ‘Proficient’ level.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

Overview

This study has investigated the skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers in Queensland with a view to distilling a collective profile. The collective profile was then juxtaposed with mandated professional teacher standards to examine points of corroboration and points of divergence. The aim has been to determine what gaps are apparent, and to consider what needs to be done to address these discrepancies.

The research began with the intent of briefly viewing the broad landscape of teaching practice, and the characteristics common to teachers in general. Teacher education, training and mentoring issues were considered, and then the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) specific to group string teaching, as evidenced in the literature, was investigated. The intention was to move from the international vantage point to the national, and then to the local.

Using a qualitative case study methodology, the endeavour was to ascertain what the key elements that constitute group string teachers are. The use of semi-structured interviews, in situ observations of classes, ensemble rehearsals and concerts, as well as the study artifacts pertaining to each of the participants’ programs, produced the body of collectable data.

From the analysis of data, certain themes became apparent. It is significant that the very different pedagogical approaches of the participants, namely Ann’s “English-inspired” approach as opposed to Yoshi and Oliver’s Colourstrings-driven method, all result in similar learning outcomes for their programs – evidence which supports the premise of the teacher as potentially the most important contributor in the instrumental music education equation for children.
A notable preliminary conclusion from this study is that there are many commonalities that define group string teachers. Indeed the extent of common ground evident between the three practitioners studied was somewhat unanticipated. Before embarking on the data collection and analysis parts of this study, the expectation was that there would be a significant number of divergences between the participants. This has not been the case. Whilst, expectedly, some variation is evident in tutor materials used, and in teaching approaches utilised, there is considerable overlap (Thompson, 1984) between the participants in most areas relating to group string instruction: the fundamental high-level instrumental skill base (Carr, 2010); the significant impact of participants’ own teachers (Mills & Smith, 2003; Cheng & Durrant, 2007); the commitment to professional development toward the growth of their capacity as teachers; the development, to a high level, of their own resources and materials; the sustained slow and steady pace of instruction in foundational technique; the significant retention of students beyond compulsory or initial years; personal attributes of the teachers like patience, the ability to communicate well (Cheng & Durrant, 2007), and leadership skills (Carr, 2010); and contributing to “beyond music” dimensions of learning and personal growth that extend further than solely learning an instrument.

Points of difference are mostly to do with the varying contexts in which each of the practitioners operates. External forces essentially determine the starting age in two of the programs whilst the youngest starting age is in the school where choice is available. Team teaching is an integral part of the group string teaching classes in two of the participants’ programs. This is significant in that much larger groups can be taught at any one time, and each participant has a lower strings specialist in the teaching team. Immersion is similarly part of the total music program in the two schools where flexibility is available, making for a more rounded music education, not just the teaching and learning of instruments. Singing is an integral component, however it appears that external forces can impede the provision of a
significant element of singing as part of the overall program, as noted in Oliver’s situation. In
spite of the absence of singing in Oliver’s string classes, there was no obvious detriment to
the pitch accuracy of students observed. It would appear that the singing dimension of the
pre-selection audition process aided in screening out the students with poorer pitch; the
mainstream class music lessons contain a component of singing, which has also contributed
positively towards ear-training for Oliver’s string class students.

In some ways the teaching styles and personalities of the three practitioners shows
greatest divergence – from the energetic and hectic pace of Yoshi to the more subdued
approach of Oliver, with Ann’s teaching dynamic lying somewhere between these two. Yet
the general respect of the children, the motivation to engender not only music skills but also a
life-long love of music and the capacity to participate in collective music-making, perhaps
inclines whatever differences there may be back to a convergence in persona.

**Practical Implications**

Numerous implications from this study are forthcoming. Undergraduate training for
group string teaching is one area in which only one of the participants had a valuable
experience. This is evidenced in that Yoshi received meaningful instruction in group string
tuition as a part of his undergraduate degree, and that as a consequence, he demonstrated a
broader pedagogical approach in his early teaching experience, rather than simply replicating
how he was taught as a student, himself. To what degree do tertiary music courses need to be
adjusted to build in a more extensive preparatory training program for prospective group
instrumental teachers?

One of the most important ramifications of this research is with regard to the essential
teacher competencies mandated by the national and state professional accreditation bodies.
Whilst clear expectations are delineated for mainstream class teachers, there is a lack of
delineated competencies deemed necessary for specialist teaching areas like group instrumental music tuition. Moreover, it might be considered aberrant that teachers in these specialist areas do not need to have an undergraduate degree and formal teaching qualification from a recognised tertiary institution. Should this dichotomy be continued into the future? Is there a need for greater corroboration between programs and practices of tertiary institutions training specialist teachers, and the professional teacher accreditation standards required by graduates?

The “open-slaughter” recruiting approach allows for a wide gamut of instrumental teachers, and this presents potential for problems. Where boundaries are lacking, there is the scope for significant anomalies. Tension is created for itinerant instrumental music staff in Queensland because of the ambiguities and anomalies as well as silences pertaining to teaching in this specialist area. Whilst over-arching professional competencies and tertiary training requirements are imposed upon “regular” teachers, these expectations are lacking in relation to instrumental teachers.

**Directions for future research**

To assist with the transition from tertiary student to beginning teacher, a constructive approach to active mentoring in the early career of instrumental teachers would provide the antidote to praxis shock (Ballantyne, 2007), and engender a sustained commitment to professional development and collegial support. The American National String Project Consortium could potentially speak into the Australian situation in terms of the whole process of mentoring young group string teachers, not only at the undergraduate level, but in the early years of professional service, in a bid to train accomplished group string teachers and transition them seamlessly into the workforce.
To what degree could the peripatetic approach to instrumental teaching in Queensland schools be applied to other educational disciplines, like mathematics and science? Could a highly skilled mathematics teacher be deployed over multiple locations in the same way that itinerant music specialists use their skills across a number of schools? The result may be that specialists in other subject areas, not currently a part of the itinerant teaching landscape, could be of benefit to a broader spectrum of the student population.

It is evident from this research that training for group string tuition needs to be given a greater focus in pedagogical study programs at tertiary institutions in Queensland. This conclusion could be transferred to other instrumental areas. Instrumental tuition has, in generations past, been the privilege of the elite. In Queensland, for more than a generation, the democratisation of instrumental music tuition has borne significant fruit, not just in the multiplied thousands of children who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to learn, but also in the significant injection of highly skilled musicians into the community and the profession at large. In the current climate, where the call for democratisation of learning opportunities for all is under constant pressure, reconceptualising initial instrumental teacher-training is vital. The participants in this study have relied largely on the work of the Australian Strings Association, and other non-tertiary bodies like the Kodaly Music Institute of Australia, to upgrade and expand their group string-teaching knowledge base. Tertiary teacher-training institutions and government-driven professional bodies need to be taking a greater lead in the continuing professional development of specialist teachers like group instrumental practitioners.
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Got ‘em on a string


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Memorandum of Agreement (2003): Instrumental music teachers/instructors between the Department of Education and the Arts and the Queensland Teachers’ Union and the Queensland Public Sector Union.


Appendices

Appendix A – Schedule of Interviews and Observations

13 September 2013 - Ethics approval gained
25 October 2013 - Yoshi interview #1; year 2 heterogeneous string class
16 May 2014 - Yoshi interview #2; year 2 heterogeneous string class
7 November 2013 - Oliver interview #1; 3x year 3, year 4, 5/6, 7 heterogeneous classes
13 March 2014 - Oliver interview #2; 2x year 3 heterogeneous string classes
23 March 2014 - Oliver interview #3 (telephone – short, supplementary)
18 March 2014 - Ann – year 5 immersion day – am small homogenous classes; pm large heterogeneous class
1 April 2014 - 2x year 5 small homogeneous classes
1 May 2014 - Ann interview #1
27 May 2014 - am year 5 large heterogeneous ensemble rehearsal
27 May 2014 - pm end-of-semester concert – intermediate strings, senior strings, chamber strings
Appendix B – Participant information sheet

Project Title: Got ‘em on a string – The collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers: Multiple cases of study in Queensland

Participant Information Sheet

This research project is being undertaken as part of a Master of Philosophy Thesis.

Supervisors:

Dr. Christopher Klopper  
DMus MMus BMus (Hons) HDE  
Director, Postgraduate Studies and Higher Degree Research  
School of Education and Professional Studies  
Phone: (07) 55529103 / Office location: G30 Rm 3.16  
Mail: Education (G30)  
Gold Coast campus Griffith University  
Parklands Drive  
GOLD COAST QLD 4122

Mr Graeme Jennings  
Senior Lecturer in Violin  
Qld Conservatorium  
Phone (07) 3735 6210 / Office Location: (S01) 1.29  
Mail: Queensland Conservatorium, South Bank campus, Griffith University, PO Box 3428 South Brisbane 4101, Australia  
Campus Address 140 Grey Street, South Bank, QLD, 4101

Student Researcher: This research is being conducted as a Griffith University student in order to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Philosophy degree.  
Graham Ashton  
Course of Study: Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University – Master of Philosophy  
Phone: 0439 808 628  
Email: graham@ashtonart.com.au

Explanation of the study and its aims:

This study will investigate the collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers in Queensland. The intent is to give teachers the opportunity to share their understandings and applications of group string teaching approaches. The research project is not an evaluation of your classroom teaching approach, but it is an investigation into the essential collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers.
Your involvement in the research is requested with a view to the researcher distilling a profile of collective skills, knowledge and attributes for group string teaching.

**Your participation in this study:**

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You will be provided with an Information Pack and opportunities to ask further questions before nominating yourself as a volunteer participant. If, for any reason, you wish to cease participation in this study you have the freedom to do so without any negative recrimination from the research team and Griffith University.

**What you will be asked to do:**

You are requested to participate in semi-structured interviews (2 – 3, at a time and for a duration suitable to you). Interviews will be audio-recorded with a view to transcription into written form. The researcher will observe a few group string teaching classes to view the implementation of teaching skills and knowledge in real time, and possibly watch the developmental nature of the teaching and learning process across the proposed six-month data collection time frame. I hope to be able to peruse written programs and lesson plans, as well as method books, any documented individual materials/approaches generated, and teaching accessories used.

**The expected findings and benefits/outcomes of the research:**

It is expected that the research will discover a high proportion of common skills, knowledge and attributes linking all of the practitioners involved. It is anticipated that there will be divergence in approach as regards specific tutor books and methods, as well as personalized approaches that have been built over extensive periods of time in group string teaching. The study has the potential to inform current group string-teaching practice, and also to transfer the findings to other instrumental teaching/other learning areas. Beyond this, there is the possibility of the research having implications for the delivery of instrumental music in primary and secondary schools across Australia. The findings of this study may be useful in informing tertiary music-training institutions so as to optimize training of undergraduate students towards successful group string teaching in the variety of primary, secondary and other schooling contexts.

**Risks to you:**

There are no foreseen risks associated with your participation in this research. Since the research project is *not* an evaluation of your classroom teaching approach, but an investigation into the collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers, the focus of the study negates any risk to you if third parties are able to identify your participation by inference in any publications that arise from the research.
Your confidentiality:

The research site, you and any other persons mentioned in the study will be done so under a pseudonym. Any data collected from you for this study will be used only for the purposes of this study. Any personal information obtained from this study will not be reproduced, published or shared with any persons outside of the research team (researcher and principal supervisors). All data collected for this study will be disposed of once the study has been completed. All audio recordings obtained will also be destroyed.

Feedback to you:

All participants will be provided with a summary of the findings in an electronic PDF format within a timely manner after data collection.

The ethical conduct of this research project:

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Griffith University is committed to researcher integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects being undertaken by members of staff and the student body. However, if you have any questions or concerns about the ethical conduct of this study you may contact the Manager of Research Ethics, Griffith University on (07) 3735 4375 or by email at research-ethics@griffith.edu.au

Legal Privacy Statement:

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded.
Appendix C – Consent form for participants

Consent form for participants

**Name of Research Project:** Got ‘em on a string – The collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers: Multiple cases of study in Queensland

Griffith University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee

**Supervisors:**

**Dr. Christopher Klopper**  
DMus MMus BMus (Hons) HDE  
**Director, Postgraduate Studies and Higher Degree Research**

School of Education and Professional Studies  
Phone: (07) 55529103 / Office location: G30 Rm 3.16  
Mail: Education (G30)  
Gold Coast campus Griffith University  
Parklands Drive  
GOLD COAST QLD 4122

**Mr Graeme Jennings**  
**Senior Lecturer in Violin**

Qld Conservatorium  
**Phone** (07) 3735 6210 / **Office Location**: (S01) 1.29  
**Mail:** Queensland Conservatorium, South Bank campus, Griffith University, PO Box 3428 South Brisbane 4101, Australia  
**Campus Address** 140 Grey Street, South Bank, QLD, 4101

**Student Researcher:** This research is being conducted as a Griffith University student in order to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Philosophy degree.

**Graham Ashton**  
Course of Study: Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University – Master of Philosophy  
Phone: 0439808628  
Email: graham@ashtonart.com.au

As a participant in this study I agree to the following:

[ ] I have read the Information Sheet, and the nature and the purpose of the research have been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have received satisfactory answers. I understand the Information Sheet and agree to take part in the research project.

[ ] I understand that the research project is being undertaken by a student researcher from Griffith University
[ ] I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, that any information or personal details gathered in the course of the research about me are confidential and that neither my name nor any identifying information will be published without my permission.

[ ] I freely agree to participate in the research project.

[ ] I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any stage and that if I do I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment.

[ ] I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.

I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:

**Ethics in Human Research Committee**  
Griffith University  
Office for Research  
Nathan campus  
Room 0.10D, Bray Centre (N54)  
Griffith University  
170 Kessels Road QLD 4111  
Ph. 3735 4375

Name of participant: __________________________________________________________

Signed: _________________________________ Date: ___________________
Appendix D – Information letter for school principal

Information Letter for School Principal

Dear

I am writing to inform you about my research project entitled:

Got ‘em on a string – The collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers: Multiple cases of study in Queensland

My research is part of a Master of Philosophy program I am undertaking at Griffith University through the Queensland Conservatorium of Music and the School of Education and Professional Studies.

This study will investigate the skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers in Queensland. The study is not an evaluation of the teachers, themselves, or of the school string program as such.

Participants

Participants in the research are experienced group string teachers who exemplify the qualities required to distil a collective profile. Teachers who have the potential to be included have been accessed via the Australian Strings Association.

Study dimensions:

Aspects of the study include semi-formal interviews with the participants, observation of group string lessons conducted by them (as well as public performances where possible), and perusal of ‘artifacts’ associated with their teaching.

Interviews:

Semi-formal interviews (audio-recorded) may be conducted at school during break times or at a time convenient to the teacher and the school. The intent is to give teachers the opportunity to share their understandings and applications of group string teaching approaches. It is anticipated that there will be two or three interviews during the data collection phase of the study.

Observations:

My intention is to observe a few group lessons across a six month period. The purpose would be to view the implementation of the teacher’s teaching skills and knowledge in real time, and possibly watch the developmental nature of the teaching and learning process across the proposed time frame.
Artifact Perusal:
It is hoped that I will be able to peruse written programs and lesson plans, as well as method books, any documented individual materials/approaches generated, and teaching accessories used.

Time Frame:
Interviews and observations would begin in October 2013, and conclude by the Winter vacation, 2014.

Research process:
I have personally invited the string specialist from your school to participate in this project during the time frame indicated. Your participation would involve allowing me access to the school site, conduct semi-formal interviews, and observe the string specialist running group classes.
It is important to note that the research would be conducted at all times under the direct guidance of my principal supervisors from the Griffith University, Dr. Christopher Klopper and Mr. Graeme Jennings.
The intention is that my attendance at the school for site visits does not disrupt normal routines and activities. It is also important to note that all participation in the research is voluntary, and no individual or institution will be identified in the research. Participants may withdraw from the research at any stage without incurring any negative consequence or discriminatory treatment.

No identifying information, such as names of individual staff members, children or school, will be recorded or published. Only researchers and principal supervisors will have access to the data.

I will contact you with a follow-up telephone call approximately one week from receipt of this letter in order to ascertain your willingness for me to participate in site visits, and to make the necessary arrangements should you be happy for your instrumental strings specialist to be involved in this study. During the follow-up telephone call you will have opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the research, if additional information or clarification is required.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation in this research.

Sincerely,

Graham Ashton
0439 808 628
graham@ashtonart.com.au
Appendix E – Consent form for principal of participating school

Consent form for principal of participating school

I, ______________________________ have read and understand the information provided to me concerning the Griffith University research project entitled:

Got ‘em on a string – The collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers: Multiple cases of study in Queensland

I consent to the research, which includes semi-formal interviews with the participants, observation of group string lessons conducted by them (as well as public performances where possible), and perusal of ‘artifacts’ associated with their teaching in the school at which I am the Principal.

I understand that my consent may be withdrawn at any time without explanation and without consequence to myself or participants. I also understand that staff and students are under no obligation to participate in the research. I understand that participants’ involvement in this research is completely voluntary, and that they may withdraw from further participation in any aspect of the research at any time without providing explanation and without negative consequence. I also understand that my participation will be treated as confidential, and that neither I, nor any other participant, will be identified by this research.

I consent to the research as described above. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Principal’s Signature: _______________________________ Date: _______

Researcher's Signature: _______________________________ Date: _______
Appendix F – Third party information sheet

**Project Title:** Got ‘em on a string – The collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers: Multiple cases of study in Queensland

Third Party Information Sheet

This research project is being undertaken as part of a Master of Philosophy Thesis.

**Supervisors:**

**Dr. Christopher Klopper**
DMus MMus BMus (Hons) HDE  
Director, Postgraduate Studies and Higher Degree Research  
School of Education and Professional Studies  
Phone: (07) 55529103 / Office location: G30 Rm 3.16  
Mail: Education (G30)  
Gold Coast campus Griffith University  
Parklands Drive  
GOLD COAST QLD 4122

**Mr Graeme Jennings**
**Senior Lecturer in Violin**  
Qld Conservatorium  
**Phone** (07) 3735 6210 / **Office Location:** (S01) 1.29  
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**Student Researcher:** This research is being conducted as a Griffith University student in order to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Philosophy degree.

**Graham Ashton**
Course of Study: Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University – Master of Philosophy  
Phone: 0439808628  
Email: graham@ashtonart.com.au

This study will investigate the collective skills, knowledge and attributes of group string teachers in the Queensland. The intent is to give teachers the opportunity to share their understandings and applications of group string teaching approaches.

Participation in this research project will be of a completely voluntary nature. The main sources of data collection will be semi-formal interviews with participants (the group string teachers), observation of group string teaching classes and concert performances, and artifact perusal (lesson plans and overviews, method books, accessories).
Access to this data will be limited to the student researcher and principal supervisors to ensure confidentiality. However it is possible that some of the material mentioned above may be retained for presentation purposes so that findings relevant to the study can be disseminated to interested professional audiences.

For any more information regarding this study or to address any concerns please do not hesitate to contact principal supervisor, Dr Christopher Klopper on (07) 5552 9103, or the Manager of Research Ethics, Griffith University on (07) 3735 4375 or by email at research-ethics@griffith.edu.au
Appendix G - Questions for Interviews

General

What is your training in string pedagogy?

What was your tertiary string-teacher training experience like?

What string teaching methods that you studied in your undergraduate or early teaching years do you still use?

What childhood experiences did you have in relation to your development as a string player?

Have you had any significant mentors that have impacted upon your approach to group string teaching?

How did your life unfold so as to become a specialist string teacher?

What professional development training has had impact on your teaching?

Do you have particular underlying motivations for string teaching? Can you detail some of these?

What epiphanies/‘wow’ moments have impacted indelibly on your approach to string teaching, in particular with groups?

Have you made changes in your approach to group string teaching over the years? If so, can you outline some of these changes and the time-frame in which they occurred?

What is the latest year level at which you start students in your group program?

To what degree do you incorporate Kodaly material into your group string classes?

How do you cope with the auditory assault of the constant bad intonation and scratchy tone quality associated with teaching beginner strings, especially in the group situation?

What is the level of attrition from your program, and what are the contributing factors to drop-out?

What are your expectations for the amount of practice time students should do? Do your practice charts/ sheets work?

What changes have you noted in children’s practice routines across the time you have been teaching?

How do you approach planning – short term/long term?

What are your thoughts on the number and duration of lessons each week?

How do you go at getting students out of class, with teachers forgetting, changes to routine, etc? In other words, what level of support do you receive from the school?
What is your policy with absenteeism from lessons/ rehearsals, for students to do assignments, etc.? How ‘Gestapo’ do you go?

Where do you source instruments for the children?

**Technique specific**

What’s your approach to the order in which left hand fingers are introduced for students (in the group setting)?

What’s your approach to introducing the bow grip?

What’s your angle on recognisable tunes v. pedagogically designed songs? What is the response of the children/ parents?

What do you do with the right hand, when students are doing left hand pizzicato?

When do you introduce ‘stopped’ notes?

How do you get a flexible elbow with the bow arm?
Appendix H - Observation schedule

What is the nature of the interaction between teacher and student – formal, flexible, relaxed, intense? What techniques do teachers use to maintain the engagement of the students throughout the lesson? To what degree are all of the students engaged throughout the whole lesson? What is the pacing of the lessons like and how much content is covered? How is the content of the lesson ordered? What types of activities are undertaken in lessons? What sorts of numbers were involved in each of the classes? What behaviour management strategies are employed? How do the teachers cope with heterogeneous group teaching? How is the teaching space organised? What tutor methods and materials are being used? In what ways do the participants include the teaching of theory and musicianship through the music being studied in lessons and rehearsals? What musical priorities do the teachers have in their instruction process? What level of hands-on help do the practitioners employ? To what degree do the teachers move around the teaching space during lessons? What is the balance between talk, demonstration and supervision of activities? What balance do the instructors maintain between teaching technique and engendering and enjoyment of playing and music-making?