Cantonese Musical Theatre in a Secondary School in Macau, China: A Curriculum Development Research Project

by

Shihan Lin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music Education
in the University of Michigan
2025

Thesis Committee:

Professor Marie McCarthy, Chair
Associate Professor Julie Skadsem
Clinical Professor Catherine A. Walker

Acknowledgements

The inspiration for this paper stems from my passion for theatre over the years. I believe that the charm of art lies in the profound impact that one's life can have on another, and it is my hope to pass on this passion to my students.

First, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my advisor, Prof. Marie McCarthy. When I first arrived, I struggled with research methods due to language barriers and had little understanding of academic writing. Thank you for your boundless patience—this thesis would not have been possible without your support.

I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Prof. Catherine A. Walker. Whether it was observing your rehearsals, participating in musical theatre ensemble technique lessons, each experience has been profoundly enriching. Additionally, I extend my thanks to Prof. Julie Skadsem for your invaluable insights into teaching sequences, which have greatly expanded my understanding of pedagogy.

I would like to acknowledge Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau, as well as Eric Chan, Raymond Chan, Carmon Lam, Jason Young, and Evie Ho, for their full support of my project. I also extend my appreciation to the original creative team of *Dalia*—Director Florence Cheung, Composer Ari Calangi, and Producer Popeye—for their generous support of my thesis project. Lastly, I am deeply grateful to the students who participated in this project—thank you for your dedication!

As I approach graduation, I realize how quickly these two years have passed. I am grateful to my 30-year-old self for stepping out of my comfort zone, moving to a foreign country, and starting from scratch to pursue my studies. I hope to carry forward the same courage and determination in my future career, embracing every challenge that comes my way.

Thank you all for being part of this journey.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iii
List of Figures vi
List of Appendices vii
Abstract viii
CHAPTER 1 1
Introduction 1
Rationale for Study 3
Cantonese Musical Theatre 5
Cantonese Opera in School: A Teacher-artist Collaboration Model 7
Purpose Statement and Research Questions 8
Definition of Terms 9
Summary 11
CHAPTER 2 12
Review of Literature 12
Musical Theatre in Schools 12
Community Musical Theatre Programs for Children 15
Children's Musical Theatre Curriculum in China 18
Extracurricular Music Activities in China 20
Impact of Educational Musical Theatre 23
Summary 25
CHAPTER 3 26
Methodology of Study 26
Research Design 26
Role of Researcher 27
Research Site: Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau 27
Selection of Participants 28
Development of Musical Theatre Curriculum 29
Data Collection 34
Data Analysis 36
Ethics Issues and Trustworthiness 37
Timeline of Study 38
Summary 39
CHAPTER 4 40
Producing and Staging *Dalia* 40
Planning and Preparation 40

Rehearsal Description and Process....45
Recording *Dalia* 51
Celebration 52
Summary 53
CHAPTER 5 54
Students' Learning and Growth in the Musical Theatre Project: 54
From Skills to Personal Development 54
Students' Prior Experience with Musical Theatre 54
Development of Understanding and Skills....55
Personal Growth 60
Overall Impression of the *Dalia* project 64
Summary 65
CHAPTER 6 66
A Collaborative Model for Musical Theatre Education 66
Key Elements....66
Communication 68
Artist-centered Collaboration 70
A Spiral Curriculum Approach to Learning....74
Cultivate a Learning Community 79
Flexibility 81
Summary....83
CHAPTER 7 85
Conclusion 85
Key Findings and Their Implications....85
Recommendations for Professional Development 90
Personal Implications of Study....92
References 95
Appendix 107

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Audition Content 32
Figure 3.2 Researsal Schedule 33
Figure 3.3 Research Questions and Data Collections 34
Figure 3.4 Timeline of Study 38
Figure 4.1 *Dalia*'s Cast and Costume Information 43
Figure 4.2 Original Mic List 50
Figure 4.3 Updated Mic List 52
Figure 5.1 Students' Perceptions of Their Growth in Performance Skills 56
Figure 5.2 Students' Perceptions of Personal Growth 60
Figure 6.1 Communication Model in this Study 68
Figure 6.2 A Spiral Curriculum Approach to Learning 74
Figure 6.3 Teachers and Students are Learners 79

List of Appendices

Appendix A 107
Appendix B 108
Appendix C 110
Appendix D 111
Appendix E 112
Appendix F 114
Appendix G 115

Abstract

The primary goal of this teacher research study was to explore the impact of musical theatre education on students' artistic, social, and personal development, and to assess the use of a collaborative and interdisciplinary curriculum model to implement the project. The purpose was to document the implementation of a musical theatre project based on the musical, *Dalia*, in a middle school in Macau, China. An excerpt from the Cantonese musical theatre show, *Dalia*, was chosen as the material for the production. Two research questions guided the study: 1) What knowledge, skills, and personal growth did students gain from their participation in the *Dalia* project? 2) What were the key elements of the collaborative curriculum model used to implement the project at the Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School in Macau? This study involved 20 secondary school students from two different music extracurricular activities at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. I collected data through interviews, questionnaires, and rehearsal and performance recordings. Findings indicate that musical theatre education, particularly through a culturally relevant production like *Dalia*, offers significant benefits for students' artistic, social, and personal growth. It enhances their musical, acting, and dance abilities while also boosting confidence and stage presence. Additionally, it fosters teamwork, communication skills, and self-expression, contributing to students' emotional and social development. The collaborative model used in the project proved to be effective in fostering interdisciplinary learning and creative engagement. Key elements of this model included communication, artist-centered cooperation, a spiral curriculum approach to learning, and flexibility.

Keywords: musical theatre pedagogy, arts education, interdisciplinary learning, collaborative model, middle school, educational benefits of musical theatre

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Musical theatre is a performance form that combines music, drama, and dance, with strong interdisciplinary learning opportunities. Producting a show requires a spirit of teamwork from performers, collaborative planning, and a diversity of skills in various art forms. It has strong potential and value in the context of arts education all over the world. According to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, western musical theatre is "a principal form of Western popular musical theatre in the 20th century, in which sung and danced musical numbers in popular and pop music styles are combined within a dramatic structure" (Sadie & Tyrrell, 2001, p. 453). In the meantime, musical theatre is a topic and activity of great interest to students across disciplines and age groups (Rajan, 2019). Watkins (2015) asserts that the value of musical theatre and its relevance in society have highlighted the importance of this performing art for children of all ages, allowing them to see themselves and hear their voices through music, theatre, and dance. Musical theatre, with its rich array of performance opportunities for students—contemporary art forms, interdisciplinary learning opportunities, and features that connect the arts to life—has the potential to be an important part of the new wave of music education (Click, 2024; Legg & Green, 2015). The study of musicals has much potential for the comprehensive development of students' musical knowledge and skills.

With eight years of experience as a music teacher in Macau, China, I have not only taught music in elementary schools but have also actively participated as a performer and producer in community theatre and youth musical theatre productions. This diverse involvement has equipped me with valuable productions experience and a unique educational perspective. A few years ago, *Hamilton* on Disney+ caught my attention. *Hamilton* is a musical that combines hip-hop and popular music elements, introducing the historical figure

of Alexander Hamilton (O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024). Without this musical, I would not know about this Founding Father who played such a significant role in American history. The show *Hamilton* demonstrated for me the value of transforming American histories into catchy, memorable songs. As a music teacher, this sparked my interest in interdisciplinary learning and cross-curricular approaches related to music education. I asked myself how we can promote musical theatre performances widely in schools and this question triggered my interest and motivated me to conduct this research study.

The popularity of musical theatre at the community level in the United States is evident also in Macau, China, but it has yet to become a major presence in schools. Youth and children's musical theatre have flourished in Hong Kong in recent years (Chan, 2015). The same applies to neighboring Macau where watching musicals has become a popular activity for many families. According to the website of the Macau Cultural Affairs Bureau (2023), the Broadway musical *The Sound of Music* offered 16 successful performances in Macau Culture Centre in August 2023, selling 92% of the tickets, and a total of 13,000 tickets. Musical theatre productions have clear economic benefits and fulfills families' entertainment needs. Data show that parents have a strong motivation to pay for classical interdisciplinary arts shows like *The Sound of Music*. Similar to Hong Kong, the consumption of youth and children's musical theatre is also influencing Macau, demonstrating that musicals have become a part of local family entertainment and children's arts education. Therefore, musicals are familiar to students in Macau and it is timely to bring musical theatre education into schools.

Several sources in the literature provide a basis and support for my study. Click (2024) provided educators with multiple resources and strategies for musical theatre program for children. Marshall's (2016) description of the role of the music director or teacher in school musicals demonstrated what dispositions, knowledge, and skills they need for teaching

musical theatre. Bobetsky (2009) provided a production strategy that can guide music teachers who are unfamiliar with the cross-disciplinary part of musical theatre.

Rationale for Study

In recent years, musical theatre, defined as a performing art that combines music, theatre, and dance, has received increasing attention from the Education Ministry in China. In the latest version of the Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standard issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2022), a mini-musical performance study task is given in the music education section: Learning Task 5: Mini-musical Performance. It emphasizes that,

> Mini-musical performances integrate music, dance, movement, art and literature to present situations or stories and express thoughts and feelings in a comprehensive artistic activity. Mini-musical performances help to strengthen the connection between music and other arts and improve students' interdisciplinary skills and comprehensive performance abilities. (p. 40)

The document also suggested content and academic requirements for teaching mini-musicals from grades three to grade nine. It can be seen that the Ministry of Education in China is increasing attention to the teaching of musical theatre in the music curriculum.

In the region of Macau, there is no specific emphasis on teaching musical theatre in music classrooms. However, in the Requirements of Basic Academic Attainments for Secondary School Education, five basic concepts of music education are outlined: strengthening musical fundamentals and enhancing aesthetic taste; focusing on musical practice, promoting musical perception; advocating individual development, cultivating innovative thinking; exploring musical functions, cultivating sound character; promoting local music and valuing cultural diversity (Macao Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, 2017). Findings of an ethnographic study by Feay-Shaw (2001) showed that, musical theatre

can improve group integration, mobility, auditory awareness, performance skills, and innovative thinking. These benefits of participation in a musical theatre production are both reflected in and can fulfill these requirements listed above.

More recently in 2015, a music textbook series, *探索音樂* (*Approach to Music*) was published that is now used in most of the schools in Macau (Hong Kong Music Publishers, 2015). In the textbook, one chapter is focused only on music appreciation and singing but without any practical application. Similar to the United States, published materials on musical theatre pedagogy are scarce due to its unique blend of practical and academic elements, making resources for educators rare (O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024; Pickering & Henson, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to develop materials to guide the implementation of educational musical theatre performance experience for both secondary school students and teachers.

In recent years, even though many original Cantonese musicals were composed in Hong Kong and Macau. However, there is still a dearth of knowledge about the role of musical theatre in music classrooms, especially in Cantonese-speaking districts. Most Broadway musicals are sung in English and rooted in American culture or historical context. For example, *Hamilton* is based on the story of Alexander Hamilton; *Hair* embodies the ideology of the 1960s counterculture, shaped by the Civil Rights Movement, the sexual revolution, and the drug culture; and *Miss Saigon* is based on the Vietnam War (Gelles, 2023; Rajan, 2019). Chinese music educators can also promote and introduce culture and historical context to students through participation in musical theatre.

The present study focuses on implementing Cantonese musical theatre in a secondary school in Macau. Teachers in the general music classroom in Macau typically present students with knowledge about musical theatre without practical application. Furthermore, the current scheduling model is only one 45-minute music class per week. It does not allow for the opportunity to mount a larger production in secondary schools in Macau. Due to the

time lag between classes and the short duration of the lessons, the project in which I proposed to develop music theatre skills is not possible within the constraints of the typical general music classroom. After talking to the director of the music department in the school where I carried out the project, we decided to convert the program to an extracurricular music activity.

Cantonese Musical Theatre

This genre refers to an original musical work written in Cantonese. The first Cantonese musical theatre was produced in Hong Kong, which was an early developer of musicals in China and even in Asia. Artists in Hong Kong have been developing musicals for 50 years (Huang, 2023). Before Hong Kong's reunification with China on July 1, 1997, Hong Kong was under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom (Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, 2019), thus nurturing the ground for the comprehensive art form of musical theatre. Being a British colony, Hong Kong was open to international influence in musical theatre.

The first original Cantonese musical theatre that can be traced back to Hong Kong is *白蛇傳（The Madam White Snake)* in 1972, based on the Chinese folktale legend of the *White Snake* (Lo, 2023). To make this western performance art form more accessible to the public, the musical is not only sung in Cantonese, but also follows the style of Cantonese opera's costumes and make-up, and employs the use of fan dances, water sleeve dance, long-sleeved duo dances, Water Flag, and other common forms of Cantonese Opera (Hu, 2019). In 1980, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre translated the Broadway musical *West Side Story* into Cantonese; it was the first translated Broadway musical to be staged in Hong Kong (Sammas, n.d.).

However, musical theatre did not become popular until 1992. In that year, the original Cantonese musical *我和春天有個約會(I Have a Date with Spring),* produced by the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, led to a boom in the development of musical theatre in Hong Kong

(Sammas, n.d.). The musical was later re-produced by the Spring-time Group with great success, with more than 83 performances and an audience of nearly 84,000 people in Hong Kong (The Spring-time Group, n.d.). Since the early 1990s, a series of outstanding Cantonese original musicals were produced, including *雪狼湖 (Snow Wolf Lake)* in 1997 and *四川好人 (The Good Person in Szechwan*) in 2003.

Cantonese popular music also influenced the development of the music style of Cantonese musical theatre. Although Cantonese pop songs in the early 20th century were mostly derived from excerpts of Cantonese Opera, the modern "Cantonese pop songs" that emerged in the mid to late 1970s were quite different. Due to colonial rule and the influence of pop music from Shanghai, Taiwan, Europe, and the United States, Cantonese pop music of this period no longer inherited the traditional Cantonese Opera style of singing (Liu, 2016). *Snow Wolf Lake,* with renowned pop singer Jacky Cheung as the Artistic Director and starring role, is a successful commercial example of accommodating Cantonese pop music and musical theatre in one place. It has been adapted into Mandarin and toured in Asia for a total of 53 performances from 2004 to 2006 (Dan, 2013).

Selected Musical Theatre Show,* Dalia *(2021)

In this study, I taught an excerpt from the Cantonese musical, *Dalia* originally produced in 2021. I selected the song “Love in Time” as teaching material for students to experience Cantonese musical theatre. *Dalia* is a children's musical written for youth in their native language, Cantonese by local playwright Florence Cheung and composer Ari Calangi. As director and writer Florence Cheung noted in the performance program, people rarely talk about death in traditional Asian culture. Therefore, she wanted to write a musical to educate students to cherish the people we meet in our lives. The story revolves around the theme of “If everyone has only 18 years to live, would you live differently?” Twelve-year-old Dalia and her ten-year-old brother Will dwell in a country where people only have 18 years to live.

One day Will learns from his deceased mother's notes that hundreds of years ago, human beings were able to live longer lives. To fulfill her brother's dream of seeing people grow old, Dalia decides to embark on a solo quest to find a god who created this world and hopefully find a way to change people's lifespan (*Dalia* program notes, 2023).

Although this is a successful example of an educational Cantonese musical, it's a musical show that was produced outside the school with a professional producer and crew. The production of the musical *Dalia* in a school setting is yet to be accomplished. For this reason, I approached the production company, TDSM Dance Studio, for permission to produce an excerpt from *Dalia* in a Macau school. As well as the play writer and director Florence Cheung and composer Ari Calangi, were fully supportive of my project. I invited Evie Ho, the assistant choreographer from the original production team to join me in the classroom project.

Language is a vessel of cultural inheritance, and performing in Cantonese not only preserves the language but also enables it to evolve and thrive. Since *Dalia* exists in a modern or fictional setting, I chose not to center the narrative around heritage, but rather to highlight musical theatre's adaptability in keeping the Cantonese language vibrant and relevant in contemporary contexts.

Cantonese Opera in School: A Teacher-artist Collaboration Model

Over the past decade, Leung (2014) has conducted a multiple case study on Cantonese Opera within various educational settings. He introduced the concept of a teacher-artist partnership into Cantonese Opera education, particularly within music classrooms. Despite Cantonese Opera (*Yueju*) being recognized on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list by UNESCO in 2009 (UNESCO, n.d.), it has remained on the fringes of Hong Kong culture and education. Li (2018) stated that higher music education is mostly dominated by western art music in China, while local traditional music is marginalized. This has greatly affected

teachers' interest, confidence, and knowledge in teaching Cantonese Opera because there was a significant connection between teachers' musical background and their interest in Cantonese opera (Leung, 2024). As a leading researcher in Cantonese Opera for school music education, Leung introduced the teacher-artist partnership as a pedagogical approach that holds promise for enhancing the quality and prominence of Cantonese Opera in education. This collaborative teaching method can bolster teachers' confidence and receptiveness toward this traditional art form, facilitate their professional development in instructing unfamiliar subjects, and foster their personal growth (Leung, 2014). Furthermore, Chang (2022) proposed that teachers can collaborate with professional opera troupes, inviting them to to lead or assist with school productions. This would allow students to receive formal and professional training while experiencing the charm of tradition most straightforwardly.

Leung (2018) identified four models of teacher-artist collaboration: teacher-centered project with artist as assistant; artist-centered project with teacher as assistant; collaborative model with parallel participation; and teacher-as-student model. In this curriculum development study, I implemented the third one, a collaborative model with parallel participation of the music teacher and guest artist-teacher (researcher) and choreographer in the musical theatre project, *Dalia*. In this model, teachers and artists collaborate in the classroom to accomplish different teaching and administrative tasks.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The primary goal was to explore the impact of musical theatre education on students' artistic, social, and personal development, and to assess the use of a collaborative and interdisciplinary model to implement the project.The purpose of this study was to examine an approach to teaching Cantonese musical theatre *Dalia* as an extracurricular activity at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. I used “Love in Time”, a 10-minute excerpt from *Dalia* as the repertoire for the study. Two questions guided this research:

1) What knowledge, skills, and personal growth did students gain from their participation in the *Dalia* project? 2) What were the key elements of the collaborative curriculum model used to implement the project at the Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School in Macau?

To examine these questions, I collected data from the perspective of teachers and students and analyzed data from interviews, questionnaires, and rehearsal and performance recordings.

Definition of Terms

Hong Kong and Macau: With Hong Kong's reunification with China on July 1, 1997, it became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. Before that, Hong Kong was under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom of Great Britain (Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, 2019). On December 19, 1999, China resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Macau and it became a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China. Before that, Macau was a Portuguese colony for 400 years (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, n.d.). "One country, two systems" is the national policy for the governance of the two special administrative regions, which allows Hong Kong and Macau to maintain the original capitalist system (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024).

Macau or Macao: The English name of Macau has two spellings: "Macau" and "Macao." Both spellings are used on the Macau government's official website, such as "City Guide of Macau" using "u" and "Macao Gastronomy" using "o." The United Nations also adopts both "Macao" and "Macau". This variation in spelling may be attributed to historical influences, language conventions, and choices made by institutions or brands (Macao News, 2023).

Cantonese: Mandarin is the official language of China. Cantonese is one of the most widely known and influential languages other than Mandarin, and it is spoken mainly in the Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, as well as in the two special administrative regions:

Hong Kong and Macau. In addition, there are also various Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants speaking Cantonese in Singapore, Malaysia, North America, Australia, and so on (Matthews & Yip, 2010). According to national census data, Cantonese has a population of about 55 million native speakers, ranking 16th among the 100 most populous languages (Lewis, 2019).

***Cantonese Musical Theatre**:* For the purposes of my study, this genre refers to an original musical work written in Cantonese. At the same time, it should be noted that translated Cantonese musicals are also an important part of musicals in the Cantonese-speaking region. In the context of translated musicals, a musical's songs and scripts originally sung in English are translated into Cantonese. The government promoted the translation of musicals into Cantonese before China resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong, which contributed to the musical theatre culture. The history in Hong Kong of different cultures provides a rich cultural environment and atmosphere for nurturing the development of this interdisciplinary art form in Cantonese.

Interdisciplinary Learning: Interdisciplinary learning involves connecting different disciplines, and synthesizing knowledge and perspectives from various disciplines (Kindelan, 2022).

-***Requirements of Basic Academic Attainments:*** The Requirements of Basic Academic Attainments is a document that was issued in 2017 by the Macau Special Administrative Region government. It refers to the basic requirements for academic competency after students complete their studies in kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school. It includes basic knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as the development of emotions, attitudes, and values (Macao Education and Youth Affairs Bureau, 2017).

***Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standard*:** This is a document issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2022. It provides standards for music, art, dance, theatre, and digital media arts for various grade levels. The 2022 version

added interdisciplinary elements for the first time, as well as defining the depth and breadth of knowledge in different disciplines. Although Hong Kong and Macau are not required to comply with the directives issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, these documents are still considered official and provide a valuable framework for schools and music educators to reference in their practices.

Summary

In Macau, a special administrative region in China, although students can learn about musical theatre in their 9th-grade textbooks, the content emphasizes only music appreciation and singing of musical theatre but does not attempt to have students experience singing combined with dancing or acting, nor learn about local culture or Chinese elements through musical theatre. This research project provides music teachers in the Cantonese-speaking district of Macau with a theoretical and practical basis for the teaching of musical theatre in the general music classroom. The project provides a positive addition to the curriculum, improving students' development in an interdisciplinary approach to singing, dance, and acting.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of the study is to expand the music curriculum in Macau secondary schools to include musical theatre as an interdisciplinary and integrated art form. Specifically, I explored approaches to teaching Cantonese musical theatre in an extracurricular activity class at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. Despite its popularity in the marketplace, there is a dearth of literature related to musical theatre in educational settings.

In China, there are limited studies on musical theatre education in Chinese schools, although there are some studies on children's musical theatre in community settings. Furthermore, this study draws on the literature describing extracurricular musical activities in Chinese schools, since my project was implemented as an extracurricular musical activity.

The literature review consists of five parts: musical theatre in schools; community musical theatre programs for children; children's musical theatre in China; extracurricular music activities in Chinese schools; and impact of educational school musical theatre.

Musical Theatre in Schools

Musical productions have been part of music education in US public schools since the early 20th century. For example, Marshall (2019) found that students from James Monroe High School performed *Robin Hood*, an operetta by Reginald De Koven, in 1939. School musical productions have grown in popularity in recent decades because of the efforts of media coverage and licensing companies (Davey, 2010). "With the increased popularity of musical theatre and the current emphasis on social justice and interdisciplinary collaboration," Marshall (2019) concluded that "musical theatre is poised to be fertile ground for teacher education and research" (p. 749). However, there is a dearth of research related to musical theatre education. What has caused the shortage of literature related to musical theatre education? Marshall (2019) summarizes four reasons: the American musical is a

young art form; commercial entrepreneurs did not share their trade secrets; musical theatre is often overlooked by the academy; and people in the musical theatre industry concentrate more on experiential learning to master technique rather than research. Referring not only to musical theatre, Barrett (2023) and Roberts (2007) also report that interdisciplinary studies or practical guidance related to interdisciplinary music education are limited.

Producing musical theatre as an interdisciplinary work in the arts requires different expertise beyond choral and instrumental skills (Davey, 2010). The creative team consists of director, music director, composer, choreographer, stage manager, lighting designer, set designer, set builder, sound designer, and costume designer (American Association of Community Theater, n.d.). Secondary music educators who direct ensembles are often assigned to produce a school musical (Davey, 2010). Burnau (1966) and Williams (2003) both argue that music curricula in universities should offer some drama, dance, or introduction to theatre training courses for undergraduate students in music teacher preparation programs. Sanderson (2015) recommended that music teachers interested in musical theatre should accumulate knowledge in four areas including basic knowledge of musical theatre, conducting and vocal pedagogy, musical theatre production, and leadership. Sanderson also suggested that in addition to formal education, being involved in community theatre and in personal professional development are good ways to acquire knowledge and skills for teaching musical theatre in schools.

While interdisciplinary expertise is important, studies show that a teacher's enthusiasm and leadership are also key elements. This is especially true when we are talking about teaching musical theatre in the music classroom rather than professional productions. Houten (1999) concluded that the quality of the musical theatre experience depends on the competency of those who are in charge of the theatrical program. Musical theatre teachers play a key role in ensuring the success of a musical. Feay-Shaw (2001) stated that children

will respond to the excitement and enthusiasm that is put forth by the adults who lead them. Roberts's (2007) study demonstrated that regular classroom teachers who have little to no training in music can also lead a successful stage production when they have passion and leadership.

For school musicals, not only are performance skills important, but students' personal growth is also a significant part of their musical journey. Students are proud of the skills they have learned to present on stage (Houten, 1999). In a journal children expressed their views on participating in a school musical, and the most frequently mentioned impressions of musicals were “fun” and “happy” (Rajan, 2016). Although the musical production process is serious, according to Chan (2015) and Wolf (2019), the artistic, social, emotional, and academic growth of students is more important than the quality of the final product in school musical productions.

Even though there is limited educational literature related to musical theatre in schools, different musical theatre commercial organizations are working with schools to expand opportunities for young performers to receive musical theatre education. In 2005, the Shubert Foundation and Musical Theatre International (MTI) Broadway Youth Program collaborated with the New York City Department of Education to launch a musical theatre program in public middle schools. In 2010, the Disney company created an educational brand Disney Musicals in Schools (DMIS), addressing the needs of students in under-resourced elementary schools. The project started in New York and later went to Nashville, then extended to more than 19 cities and 529 schools, working with more than 1,587 teachers and 60,593 students all over the world. The project adds a new site per year (Cerniglia, 2022; Wolf, 2019).

In addition to purchasing ready-made musicals from copyright companies, some of the schools create their original musicals based on-school history in special anniversary years

to deepen students' understanding of the school and cultivate a sense of belonging (Musical Trio, n.d.).

Community Musical Theatre Programs for Children

Even though it happens outside of the school, community musical theatre is an important site of musical theatre education.

> The beginnings of community theatre in the U.S. are not well recorded…. In 1877, the Footlight Club was founded in Jamaica Plain, MA and has been declared by AACT [American Association of Community Theatre] to be the oldest continuously producing community theatre in the US. (Lynch, n.d, para 1)

Community theatre was established as an important and meaningful performing arts platform in the 1960s (Rajan, 2016). Until now, according to Wolf's (2023) research, community theatre has more than 1.5 million people participating in over 46,000 productions at more than 8,000 community theatres across the United States. Each year, at least 86 million family members, friends, neighbors, and fellow thespians attend these productions.

Musical theatre in the community tends to prioritize education over the commercial orientation of Broadway musicals. Composers and scholars believe that singing songs from a musical is a method that increases memory and will stick with students for years to come, reinforcing knowledge more than verbal repetition (Acton, 2020; Calvert & Tart, 1993). A number of musicals emerged for the children's market during the 1970s and 1980s that featured simple harmonies with lots of big chorus numbers. These shows have a limited duration between 20-40 minutes, including accompaniment music and stage directions for teachers to use (Acton, 2020). Short, accessible educational musical theatre shows began to spread in the community since 1970s. In 1993, Stephen Sondheim, at the suggestion of producer Freddie Gershon, started to adapt the musical *Into the Woods* into a children’s show.

Sondheim's involvement led to an increase in the number of composers and producers joining in the development of musicals for children.

Freddie Gershon initiated collaborations with MTI's authors to develop junior adaptations of their popular productions (Cerniglia, 2022). Then, the Musical Theatre International launched a musical resource package, “Musical in a box” for teachers with readymade, professionally edited scripts and scores. The theatrical licensing agency, Musical Theatre International, digitized these materials and schools benefited from the digital version of ready-made, professional scripts and scores. Gershon’s foresight revolutionized the production of musicals for children (Wolf, 2020). In the same decade of the 1990s, Broadway Junior was conceived and created by Freddie Gershon in 1996 (Music Theatre International, n.d.). Now, more than 100,000 musicals are licensed to schools, colleges, and summer camps around the world each year (Cerniglia, 2022).

In contrast to the teaching of musicals in schools, children initially learn about musicals in the community through family and friends, performances, and movies (Rajan, 2016). Disney has promoted community musical theatre through movies, television, theme parks, and media platforms. Data show that more than 100 million Americans, around 38% of Americans, have been involved with a licensed Disney show as cast, crew, or audience members (Playbill, 2018). It can be said that musical theatre is an art form that is artistically accessible to most people, especially children, largely due to Disney's efforts over the past 30 years in adapting its movies into musicals (O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024). Disney's licensing model has significantly affected community theatre. By providing license models, resources, and rehearsal suggestions for their shows, Disney has enabled community theatres to perform well-loved productions, building a sense of community through musical theatre (Playbill, 2018).

In addition to producing classic animated musical movies such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King* in musical theatre versions, Disney also produces original musical movies that are closely related to the lives of teenagers and pop cultures. Bickford (2012) stated that the musical movie *High School Musical* followed the musical theatre's creative structure, incorporating student culture and catering to popular musical style. The soundtrack became the best-selling album of 2006 on Billboard (Cerniglia, 2022). The success of *High School Musical* reflects the growing consumption of mainstream music products by children and the prominence of children and youth as artists in popular culture (Bickford, 2012), attracting more teenagers to start experimenting musical theatre.

Moreover, some college students from professional institutions have also contributed to the development of community musical theatre. In 2011, students Ashley Park and Laura Reed from the University of Michigan's School of Music, Theatre & Dance founded the Michigan Performance Outreach Workshop (MPOW), an organization dedicated to sharing the educational power of the musical theatre and inspiring youth through workshops, performances, and educational activities both on campus and in the community. Each semester, MPOW brings approximately 100 fifth-grade students from surrounding areas to campus for a day of performances and performing arts workshops, hosted by students from various disciplines who are passionate about the arts and arts education. These activities allow the students to experience everything the School of Music, Theatre & Dance has to offer (Michigan Performance Outreach Workshop, n.d.). One more example, Paul Sabey's team from the Queensland Academy of Excellence in Musical Theatre, emphasizes the importance of providing lessons to interested individuals at a much earlier age. With in-kind government support, Sabey's team traveled several thousand kilometers to Cairns, a regional center in Australia, to deliver a weekend immersion program for students. The initiative aimed to inspire participants to pursue formal training in preparation for college program

auditions. The program was well received, with a strong emphasis on expanding access to musical theatre training for younger students. Its impact includes greater engagement and awareness among regional students, inspiring them to pursue formal training pathways. (O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024).

The accessibility of musical theatre through community programs, school partnerships, and digital resources has been instrumental in fostering early interest and engagement among young learners. While the United States has a well-established tradition of community-based musical theatre education, other regions such as China are beginning to explore its potential. Driven by the growing influence of global entertainment giants like Disney and the increasing demand for arts education, China is gradually integrating musical theatre into children's educational experiences.

Children's Musical Theatre Curriculum in China

As the global reach of Disney movies, television, and theme parks continues to grow, the appeal of musical theatre has expanded beyond English-speaking countries (Cerniglia, 2022). The first original Cantonese musical theatre can be traced back to a production of *The Madam White Snake* in Hong Kong in 1972 (Lo, 2023). The first Broadway musical staged in mainland China was *The Musical Man* in 1987, but musicals were not common in China until the 2010s (MacDonald, 2020). At the time, Hong Kong was a British colony and remained so until it was reunited with China in 1997.

In China, with the continuous changes in arts education curriculum standards in recent years, more emphasis has been placed on the cultivation of students' comprehensive abilities in elementary and secondary school. In a study of a Chinese musical classroom, Lai (2013) demonstrated that musical theatre education is an indispensable part of quality education as it can enhance students' artistic quality and aesthetic ability. Although musical theatre is relatively mature in the United Kingdom and the United States, it is still a new topic for both

music educators and students in the development of arts education in China (Ding, 2020). At the same time, content about musical theatre in the teaching materials in Chinese secondary school music curricula is limited and students' understanding of the uniqueness of musical theatre can be superficial (Fan, 2015).

In this regard, several scholars have made suggestions for change. Teachers need to be prepared in advance for the content of musical theatre shows (Yuehua, 2020). They benefit from using online resources as assignments to deepen their understanding of musicals and multiple cultures (Geng, 2021; Lai, 2013; Qu, 2017). Qu (2017) suggested that the teaching of musical theatre should not limit student participation to the mode of appreciation and singing; rather, students should sing and move at the same time, and then combine it with the teaching of drama.

In Hong Kong, a Special Administrative Region of China, the musical market for children and youth has been booming in recent years because of the concept of "winning at the starting line", which means parents should provide children with good educational resources for children in early childhood to help them succeed in their future learning and careers. This reinforces the modern perception of childhood consumerism (Chan, 2015). Chan's (2015) research highlights that the Hong Kong Children's Musical Theatre (HKCMT) is committed to showcasing Hong Kong's rich cultural diversity and identities through the creation and performance of children's musicals. The company finds a balance between western classical repertoire and local cultural elements, making their productions both local and international—for example, adapting western classical musicals to local contexts and performing shows in Cantonese. Meanwhile, creating original musical works that reflect Hong Kong culture is also one of the key directions of the troupe. Students are encouraged to take part in script writing so that through the interactive and hands-on approach, they can have a deeper understanding and expression of the local culture.

Another theatre company, the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre, organized the Jockey Club Character Education Musical Theatre Project (2019-2021) to provide in-school and co-school musical theatre training to a total of 30 secondary schools in Hong Kong. This was a unique event in Hong Kong's drama education in the past 20 years. The main promoter of the project, Mr. Eric Ho (何力高), Principal of Pui Ching Secondary School in Hong Kong, stated that he hopes to develop 4Ds through students' participation in the Musical Theatre Project: dedication, discipline, discovery, and delight.

Musical Trio (n.d.), a professional musical theatre blog in Hong Kong suggests that although Cantonese musicals don't have the same variety of choices as Broadway productions, the development of Cantonese musicals is becoming more mature, and it is worthwhile for schools to cooperate with local arts organizations and companies to produce Cantonese school musicals.

Extracurricular Music Activities in China

Musical theatre usually appears as an extracurricular activity or after-school program in the school setting (Rajan, 2019). Similar to Rajan's (2019) findings about musical theatre in US schools, musical theatre has a minimal presence in the general music classroom and is more likely to appear in extracurricular activities in China.

Teaching musical theatre as an extracurricular activity offers many benefits. It attracts genuinely interested students, fostering enthusiasm and engagement in a flexible, creative environment without grades or curricular constraints. Multi-age participation promotes collaboration, while flexible rehearsal schedules accommodate students' needs. Community professionals and volunteers provide expertise, enriching the overall experience (Click, 2024). It has become common practice for secondary schools to provide students with educational opportunities outside the compulsory school curriculum. However, there is little

research literature that systematically documents and investigates extracurricular activities (Pitts, 2007).

In this study, extracurricular music activities in schools in China are defined as music activities for K-12 students that take place on campuses after school hours. There are three types of extra-curricular music activities in Chinese schools nationally.

1) Group activities for all students: These activities include educational or festival-themed singing contests and performances, school concerts organized by music teachers, and singing or instrument-playing competitions

2) Ensemble: activities to develop students' musical ability that include choirs, folk bands, brass bands, orchestras, drum bands, and local ethnic bands

3) Student-led activities: music interest groups organized by students serving all the students that include campus radio stations and music publications

It can be seen that extra-curricular music activities are broad ranging including not only ensembles but many different types of activities that take place on campus after school hours (Xu & Zhang, 2003).

The high school general music program can be inextricably linked to the program of extra-curricular music activities. Xue (2012) stated that high school general music electives have five modules—singing, playing instruments, composing, music and dance, and music and theatre performance. These five modules equip students with fundamental musical knowledge and performance opportunities, while extracurricular music activities enhance campus life and support their mental well-being. Overall, the school fosters a richer artistic atmosphere, allowing students to apply and showcase what they learn in the classroom, ultimately strengthening their overall musical abilities.

Although there are many benefits to participating in extra-curricular music activities, there is stereotypical thinking about their value to students. According to Xiao’s (2023)

research study, the development of extra-curricular music activities in China can be traced back to the "Primary School Teaching Program and Regulations on Extracurricular Activities in Primary Schools" issued by the Ministry of Education in 1955. The document stated that students in the upper grades could participate in extracurricular activities voluntarily but with teachers' approval. However, students with poor academic performance would not participate. Students' participation in extra-curricular activities, therefore, was linked to their academic performance. This link remains in place today. Students who do not perform well in academics may not be eligible to participate in extracurricular activities. This practice led many people to believe that extracurricular activities take time away from students' studies and do not have a significant positive impact on students. Guo's (2011) thesis explained that since the resumption of the college entrance examination system in 1977, parents hope their children will have a successful career through their academic performance. Therefore, students are placed under tremendous pressure to perform well in their academic studies. Since music is not considered as a subject in the college entrance examination, parents think that learning music is worthless, which minimizes its value as an extra-curricular activity.

Meanwhile, the original intention of extracurricular music activities has been distorted in many schools where music activities serve to prepare students to participate in competitions and win prizes (Guo, 2011; Xiao, 2023). Schools only pursued the preprofessional development of a few students in the ensemble but neglected the extracurricular music activities for all students. Zhang and Xu (2003) stated that many schools regarded extracurricular music activities as a platform to showcase the school's achievements and to prepare a select group of students for professional careers in music.

Yang (2007) examined the situation in rural areas and concluded that due to the lack of funds, availability of musical instruments as well as related professional teachers were scarce resources which limited music activities. The author observed that children in rural

areas have limited exposure to music and emphasized the importance providing music information and announcements on school notice boards. This would ensure that students have opportunities to engage in a music curriculum. She also suggested that schools should cooperate with music organizations outside the school to share instruments and teacher resources.

In conclusion, extracurricular music activities and general music education complement each other. Although the Ministry of Education has emphasized the importance of extracurricular music activities since 1955, due to academic pressure and utilitarian purposes of education, extracurricular music activities have not flourished as expected.

Impact of Educational Musical Theatre

Musical theatre is popular all over the world. In addition to its entertainment qualities, it can also have a positive impact on a teenager's growth. Students report that participating in musical theatre is an impactful experience in their lives (Houte, 1999). Feay-Shaw's (2001) ethnographic study of a fifth-grade musical theatre production of *Johnny Appleseed* involved 43 students from two classes and their teachers. Through observation, interviews, and video fieldnotes, Feay-Shaw found that students' auditory awareness, vocal skills, music reading skills, dramatic skills, and motivation to perform became stronger after participating in musical theatre.

Roberts (2007) explored the practical implementation of musical theatre by examining elementary school students' participation in a seven-week rehearsal and performance process for the musical *Welcome to the Jungle*. As a participant observer and teacher, Roberts delved into the students' acquisition of interdisciplinary knowledge of the arts, development of their self-concept, and their musical achievement. The author emphasized the importance and potential of musical theatre in developing multi-artistic understanding, self-identity, and musical skills in elementary school students.

In John's (2014) study of five casts of a suburban public high school musical production, he found that participation in high school musical theatre productions promotes positive social and personal development through the formation of a community of practice. By becoming part of a community of practice, students found meaning in the musical, gained unity through rehearsal practice, felt a sense of community belonging, and the experience fostered individual and collective identity. Click (2024) also mentioned that in addition to performance skills, students greatly benefit from the sense of community and friendships built during the rehearsal process.

Musical rehearsals can serve as a bridge between the school and the broader community, fostering closer relationships between teachers and students. Phillips (2004) suggests that "musicals are a truly American art form and provide students with specialized knowledge and instruction.... They can integrate many areas of the school and create a bond among faculty and students that encompasses the entire school" (p. 200). Findings in the report of *The Jockey Club Sing Out Character Education Musical Project* in Hong Kong indicated that the online musical project during the epidemic had enabled teachers to learn about the home conditions of their students, and teachers found that they had become closer to their students (Yuen-fun, 2022). In a report issued by The Center for Arts Education in New York city, Israel (2009) stated that schools offering music, drama, dance, and visual arts programs can motivate students to stay in school, and the schools that have the most opportunities for arts education have the highest graduation rates. Not only are students closer to their teachers but educators can use musicals as a vehicle to explore subject areas outside of the arts and collaborate with teachers of other subjects—English, science, math, history, and physical education, thus providing opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration (Click 2024; Morgan, 2018).

Participation in musical theatre can also have a positive impact on students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Bailey et al (2021) used a mixed-methods approach to examine the effects of a 4-week musical theatre intervention in schools on 121 elementary school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Results indicated that the musical theatre intervention had a positive impact on the socialization of students. By engaging in musical theatre activities such as singing, rehearsing, and acting out dramatic scenes, students were able to improve social skills such as eye contact, conversation, engagement, social awareness, and self-confidence.

Summary

Since the emergence of school musicals in the middle of the twentieth century until recently, few studies have documented their development in school culture or their reception by students and parents. Authors suggest that to address this need, the initial focus should be on understanding the necessary preparation of high school music teachers to teach musical theatre. Concurrently, community theatre organizations like Musical Theatre International and Broadway Junior have introduced youth programs, contributing to the growing popularity of musical theatre in communities and schools.

With the globalization of media, including films like *High School Musical*, musical theatre has become popular worldwide, including in China. Although musicals are relatively new to Chinese students, they have become increasingly popular in the community. In recent years, original Cantonese musicals have been composed and produced. Some musicals are appropriate for use in secondary schools.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology of Study

The primary goal of this study was to explore the impact of musical theatre education on students' artistic, social, and personal development, and to assess the use of a collaborative and interdisciplinary model to implement the project. The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of a musical theatre project based on the musical*, Dalia*, in a middle school in Macau, China. An excerpt from the Cantonese musical theatre show, *Dalia*, was chosen as the material to present in the classroom. Two research questions guided this research: 1) What knowledge, skills, and personal growth did students gain from their participation in the *Dalia* project? 2) What were the key elements of the collaborative model used to implement the project at the Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau?

This chapter outlines the research setting, focusing on school context and the researcher's roles. It details participant selection, curriculum development for *Dalia*, and the collaborative rehearsal process. Data collection methods, including interviews, Questionnaire, and recordings are discussed as well as ethical considerations. Finally, the study timeline is presented, framing the methodological approach to teaching Cantonese musical theatre.

The entire Dalia project, including all data collection and participant interactions, was conducted in Cantonese to ensure cultural and linguistic relevance for the target population. All the data were recoreded in Cantonese. The interview texts were initially translated using DeepL translation software, after which I manually reviewed and modified all translations. I read the sources multiple times, and translated into English those excerpts that I chose to include in my thesis.

Research Design

The design used for this research study was teacher research, focusing on how to teach musical theatre in a secondary school setting. Teacher research is a systematic process

of inquiry by teachers to gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning. It seeks solutions to curricular problems and promotes change in the classroom or the school (Henderson, Meier, & Perry, 2012). A teacher's understanding of both their teaching and their students offers a valuable "insider" perspective on the teaching and learning process (Robbins, 2014).

To investigate the teaching of Cantonese musical theatre in a school setting, this study incorporated data from multiple sources, including documents used in curriculum planning, video recordings of a series of rehearsals, questionnaires, interviews, and a reflection journal. Designed to address the specific needs of my project, this research aimed to identify effective ways to integrate musical theatre into my teaching practices.

Role of Researcher

In this study, I had multiple roles as a co-producer, lead producer, teacher, and researcher. As a co-producer, I worked with the music teacher Jason (she/her), the choreographer Evie, the sound engineer Lekhang, and the head of the music department Carmon, among others, to form the musical theatre project team. As a lead producer of the unit with my teaching colleague Jason, I designed the rehearsal schedules and content. As the director who instructed students in musical theatre, I was the lead teacher in the classroom, while my co-teacher, Jason, observed the process and assisted with instruction. As a researcher, I recorded and documented each step of the process, gathered data from participants, and maintained a research journal to reflect on the pedagogy of each rehearsal. For this study, each participant selected an English pseudonym by their own.

Research Site: Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau

The research site that I chose for the project was Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. It is a school under the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Macau Mission District. It was founded in 1919 and is one of the oldest Christian schools in the country with a long history

in Macau. At the time of the study, the school had two campuses, Rua de Pedro Nolasco da Silva, no.53, and Avenida do Dr. Francisco Vieira Machado, no.266, with three levels—Kindergarten, Primary School, and Secondary School.

The school has one of the leading music programs in Macau (Zhejiang Province Musicians' Association, 2022). At the time of the study, the secondary school program in general music was focused on music exploration, basic music theory, and the appreciation of music from different time periods. The music department also collaborated with other subject areas such as religion or information technology. Each year, the school organizes an annual music competition for all 11th-grade students. In each class, students adapt lyrics based on existing popular songs, learn script writing under the guidance of Chinese teachers, and learn painting from the art teacher to create a backdrop for the stage. The entire class works together to create a mini musical that is around 20 minutes long. In summary, Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau is a school that was well suited for implementing the musical theatre project, *Dalia*.

Selection of Participants

Students were selected by the music teacher and the head of music department from two in-school music extracurricular activities: 6 sopranos and 4 altos from the Choi Kou School Choir, and 4 tenors, 5 baritones, 5 basses from the all-male a cappella group, CKppella. All 24 students were invited to audition for the *Dalia* project, the auditions were aimed to identify special roles for individual students. The audition procedures are described in Chapter 4.

Choi Kou School Choir, which consisted of over 60 girls in 2024, was established over 20 years ago. The Choir aims to develop students' interests in music and choral singing through training and performing events, and to teach members about the importance of humility and team spirit. Over the last decade, the choir achieved brilliant results in numerous

contests. In 2019, they won the Gold Medal in the Open Competition and Grand Prix of Nations of the 4th European Champions Competition and the Grand Prix of Nations Gothenburg. The choir also received the Best Interpretation Award & Best Harmony Award in 2019 at the Asia Pacific Choral Summit in Hong Kong.

Ckppella is an acappella group composed of male students from Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. The group performs in many school concerts and competitions. They won 3rd place and Best Vocal Percussion awards at the National Junior Acappella Competition in 2022. In July 2023, they represented Macau at the World Choir Games and won the bronze award in the pop ensemble open category.

Development of Musical Theatre Curriculum

Repertoire: Cantonese Musical, Dalia

Dalia was the musical chosen for this thesis project because of its cultural significance and subject matter. It is a Cantonese-language musical written by the director Florence Cheung, who was invited by TDSM Dance Studio to write a piece to educate students about life. Director and choreographer Florence Cheung and composer Ari Calangi are both native Macanese. The story of *Dalia* is relevant to students' cultural background and language more than productions from New York's Broadway and London's West End. Cheung was a highly reputable choreographer and director in the field of Cantonese musicals. In 2016, she was invited by Walt Disney to be the choreographer for the production of *Frozen* in Shanghai Disneyland Park. Composer and singer/songwriter Ari Calangi has performed as a musician with many well-known pop singers in the Chinese music industry.

Dalia was premiered on July 23-25, 2021, in the TDSM Dance Studio and T-Theatre, and was re-run at Parisian Macau on January 7-8, 2023. It is a musical theatre show written about teenagers and specifically for teenage performers. Although I was not directly involved

in the production of the shows in Macau, I have collaborated with the production team as a vocal coach and I'm familiar with their production process.

Excerpt from* Dalia*, "Love in Time"

"Love in Time" is a song from *Dalia*. The show had a total of seven songs, and Love in Time is the third of the songs. The plot tells of the female protagonist, Dalia, who lives in a world where the life span is only 18 years. Inspired by the stories of her deceased parents, she becomes curious and decides to embark on an adventure to uncover the secrets of how people in the past lived longer lives. Determined to pursue this quest, she went to a matchmaking event, hoping to find a lifelong partner who could also take care of her younger brother.

During the event, other characters interact with Dalia: the host Angelo, an over-confident elitist Billy, a narcissistic Mr. M&M, and Kimoto who is a karate fighter but dreamed of being a singer. Others appeared in the scene whose role is to show the audience different outlooks on life by performing their talents and sharing their aspirations.

The song Love in Time is 09:27 long and includes many genres such as hip-hop, jazz, and ballad. It can be broken down into 8 verses, and interspersed with lines from different characters and dancing scenes. In the original version, there was a total of 10 performers. In this educational version, I invited 24 students, including 10 soloists (4 tenor, 3 baritone, and 3 altos) and 14 chorus members with two-part harmony in the chorus parts.

Permission Rights

Whether a musical is a Broadway production or an amateur theatre show, producers need to first consider permission rights, price, and conditions (Farber, 2004). Thus, the first task was to secure the rights from the copyright company since *Dalia* was not a musical written by a school teacher or student. Luckily, after speaking with *Dalia*'s creative team, the production company TDSM Dance studio, and the creators, Florence Cheung and Ari Calangi, all offered me free rights to produce an excerpt from the musical work (personal

communication, Jan 18, 2024). Based on my discussion with Jason, the school music teacher, we decided to choose “Love in Time” as the excerpt from *Dalia* for this project. This excerpt was beginner-friendly for students in Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau.

Organization of the Team

Musical theatre is a performing art form that brings together many collaborators. Music teachers are often required to form a collaborative musical production team. In this project, I took the role of lead teacher in the drama rehearsals, and music teacher, Jason, helped rehearse the singing parts and communicated with the school administration. Choreographer, Evie taught the dances and adapted the choreography of the original show for the students. I also invited an alumnus of the school, Lekhang who had lighting and sound expertise to be the technician for the show.

Rehearsal Preparation

Since the school did not have a musical theatre education program before this production, it was important to understand the performance level of the students. Although the students had won many music awards under the guidance of their teachers, they had not been involved in rehearsals with drama or dance. I interviewed the music teacher, Jason, to understand students’ performance background in musical theatre and other relevant performing experiences. She communicated about student participants, rehearsal schedules, and reserving classrooms for auditions, rehearsals, and performances. She also assisted me in inviting students to participate in the audition for the musical theatre project, *Dalia*. I communicated with the choreographer, Evie to discuss the design of choreography for students with no previous dance experience.

Audition

Auditions were held on May 19 and May 21 during the regular rehearsal time of Ckppella and Choi Kou School Choir. The audition had three components—music, drama, and special skills.

Figure 3.1

Audition Content

Category	**Audition content**
Music	1) Sang a popular song 2) Took a simple voice test: Test range and tessitura
Drama	Performed a selection from *Dalia's* script
Special skills	Asked if they have any special music or dance skills. If appropriate, perform a short piece.

A musical theatre audition form for teachers is included in Appendix A. The form included five parts. The first part asked whether a student could attend the six rehearsals and the final video recording. It then inquired about their voice part and which role they were interested in, their past performance experience, and finally, the teacher's evaluation of the student's performance ability in each area.

Audition Result

After consulting Jason, role assignments were announced to students during the school day on Thursday, May 23. On that day, students received an invitation to join the cast, and the role they had been assigned was listed. Attached to the invitation was an audition result letter and consent form to participate that had to be signed by parents and students. This contract needed to be returned to Jason by Tuesday, May 28. The consent form and audition result letter are listed in Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively.

Rehearsal Schedule

Figure 3.2 provides a detailed overview of the rehearsal schedule and concert performance. The rehearsals were structured to cover various aspects of the production,

including script analysis, character development, vocal coaching, dance routines, and stage blocking.

Figure 3.2

Rehearsal Schedule

Schedule	**Rehearsal content** **Site:** Music room on the 6th floor / Room 302	**Educators**
26/5 10:00- 13:00	**Table read** Introduced the entire cast **Characterization** Analyzed the script **Practiced songs, and vocal coaching** **Discussed costumes** **Assignment: Question about your character** 1. Who am I? 2. Where do I live? 3. What's my favorite thing to do? 4. What motivates my character to enter this space? 5. A journey I went through in this song	Shihan, Jason
28/5 13:15- 14:00	**Dance rehearsal** Learned the **movement in the theme song**	Evie, Shihan, Jason
30/5 13:15- 14:00	**Dance rehearsal**	Evie, Shihan, Jason
1/6 14:00- 17:30	**Acting rehearsal / Blocking** Directed how the actors would move on stage as they interacted with each other **Dance rehearsal** **Rehearsed songs with dance** **Notes**	Shihan, Jason
4/6 13:15- 14:00	**Dance rehearsal go-through** **First run-through*** **Note sesstion**	Evie, Shihan, Jason
6/6 13:15- 14:00	**Second run-through**	Evie, Shihan, Jason
9/6 9:00- 13:00	**Site: School auditorium** **Dressed up** **Sound check (1 hour)** **Dress rehearsals** **Questionnaire,** **Video recording**	Evie, Shihan, Jason
	Total: 630 mins	

Data Collection

The purpose of the data collection was to document the teaching and learning process in relation to my research questions. The sources of data included video recording of rehearsals and the final performance; Questionnaire of all students; focus interview with students; interviews with teachers and administrator; researcher journal; and artifacts. A table of how each of the data collection sources connected with the research questions is provided.

Figure 3.3

Research Questions and Data Collections

Research questions	Data from teachers	Data from students
1) What knowledge, skills, and personal growth did students gain from their participation in the *Dalia* project?	a. Video recordings rehearsals and performance b. Interviews with teachers and administrator	a. Video recordings rehearsals and performance b. Questionnaire of all students c. Focus interview with students d. Researcher journal e. Artifacts
2) What were the key elements of the collaborative model used to implement the project at the Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau?	a. Video recordings of rehearsals and performance b. Interviews with teachers and administrator c. Researcher journal d. Artifacts	

Video Recording of Rehearsals

To document the entire Cantonese musical theatre program *Dalia*, I video recorded all music rehearsals. Because I played multiple roles as a co-producer, co-teaching planner, director, and researcher, it was necessary to record all the rehearsals to collect data. Recordings also provided materials for discussion and review with the music teacher and choreographer after the project was over. I used two iPhones for video rehearsal recording, placing them at two different angles of the classroom. The rehearsal videos were uploaded to Google Drive for backup after each rehearsal. For the final performance recording, I reserved

a camera from the school and invited a student from the multi-media extracurricular activity class to control it.

Questionnaire

Student participants completed a questionnaire (see Appendix D) to provide feedback on their experience of performing in the musical theatre show, *Dalia*. The questionnaire was distributed and completed immediately after the recording of the performance in the school auditorium. It was distributed via QR code which students completed using their mobile phones. In addition, I provided two computers for students who did not have access to a device, and paper copies were also made available.

The questionnaire had eight questions and was divided into three parts. The first part investigated students' previous experience in musical theatre. The second part investigated the students' responses to their experience of performing Cantonese musical theatre in the show *Dalia*. The third part of the survey consisted of an open-ended question, inviting students to describe their thoughts freely about their experience of Cantonese musical theatre.

Focus group interviews

After the final performance I conducted a focus group interview with four students who participated in the project, *Dalia*. Jason and I selected two lead actors and two chorus members. The focus group interview took place in the corridor and was audio recorded on an iPhone. Students were asked about their understanding of musical theatre; what skills they learned; if they encountered challenges during the rehearsal; and, their preferences and feelings about participating in the program. The interview questions are listed in Appendix E. The focus group interviews were uploaded to Google Drive for backup.

Interviews with Teachers and Administrator

The post-project focus Interview-gathered feedback from members of the school community after the project was completed. A total of five people participated in the

meeting—the music teacher Jason, choreographer Evie, the head of the music department Carmon, the head of extra curriculum Raymond, and myself. The questions focused on two areas: changes perceived in students' performance and non-performance skills, and key elements of an effective collaborative model for implementing a musical theatre project. The interview questions are listed in Appendix E. One iPhone was used for recording the focus group interview, two iPhones placed at two different angles of the music classroom. The interview recordings were uploaded to Google Drive for backup.

Research Journal

Self-reflection is an important component of teacher research as it contributes to a more objective and authoritative research process. Throughout the process of rehearsing *Dalia* with students, I kept a journal that included my observations and reflections based on the video recording of rehearsals, as well as a log documenting the teaching steps that Jason, Evie, and I used in each rehearsal.

Artifacts

I collected artifacts related to the project, including materials on Cantonese musical theatre repertoire, specifically *Dalia,* rehearsal plans co-created with teachers, communications related to the audition, student-generated materials, and photographs originating in the project, excluding the student performers due to their status as minors.

Data Analysis

Since the project was conducted in Macau, China, with the theme of Cantonese musical theatre education, the entire research process was conducted in Cantonese. All documents were translated from English into written Cantonese, and then back into English. Additionally, I used two apps, Messenger and WeChat, to communicate with my group in Macau and to share documents. Apart from the interview on May 19, which was conducted

via Zoom, all other interviews and rehearsals were held in person at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School in Macau.

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the study, and various forms of data were recorded and transcribed. For data organization, I transcribed the recorded material from each rehearsal, interview, and final performance. Secondly, I coded and indexed the data based on my research questions. Third, a cross-data analysis was used to compare the experiences of students and teachers during the project. Data sets were grouped into three categories: teachers, and students, and researcher observations and reflections.

Ethics Issues and Trustworthiness

Before the study, I wrote to the production company TDSM Dance Studio, and the creators, Florence Cheung and Ari Calangi to request permission to perform an excerpt from *Dalia*. The team granted me free rights for the musical *Dalia* to be used in Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau school for research purposes.

I submitted my proposal to the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board to ensure that my research was ethical. Permission for the research was also sought from the principal of Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau and the head of the music department. Upon receiving the administrator's permission, the school's extracurricular activities administration department issued a consent form with their official stamps in Cantonese to parents on May 23 (see Appendix F). Student returned their consent form during rehearsals. An English version of this form is listed in Appendix G.

To ensure the validity of my data, I collected data from multiple sources. The Questionnaire, field notes, and interview with the music teacher, dance teacher and the head of music department provided a multi-dimensional approach to ensure that my research sources were authentic and reliable. To ensure that I, as a multi-role person, avoided being

overly subjective in my response, it was important that I conducted self-reflection sessions and wrote regular entries in my research journal and log.

Timeline of Study

The study progressed from refining research methodologies in early 2024 to implementing the Cantonese Musical Theatre project, including auditions, rehearsals, and curriculum development from April to June. Data collection through Questionnaire, and interviews followed, with analysis conducted from September to December 2024, see figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.4

Timeline of Study

January, 2024	Deepened research directions and developed research methodologies
February, 2024	Invited teachers and school to collaborate
March, 2024	Requested copyright permission to produce the show
April, 2024	- Discussed project and rehearsal and performance plans with Jason and Evie - Developed Cantonese Musical Theatre curriculum for *Dalia*
May, 2024	- Thesis proposal approved - Developed Cantonese Musical Theatre curriculum for *Dalia* - Sent audition invitations - Held auditions - Distributed audition result and consent form - Refined rehearsal plans
May-June, 2024	- Implemented the Cantonese Musical Theatre project - Video-recorded rehearsals for project - Designed program notes for final performance
June, 2024	- Conducted survey of student participants via questionnaire (June 9) - Students focus group interviews (June 18) - Collected post-curriculum project feedback interviews (August)
September-December, 2024	- Conducted data analysis

Summary

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for implementing the musical theatre project *Dalia* at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau, aiming to explore its impact on students' artistic, social, and personal development and assess the effectiveness of a collaborative, interdisciplinary model. The teacher-research approach involved the researcher taking on multiple roles, including co-producer, lead planner, teacher, and researcher, while collaborating with a team of educators and professionals. Participants were selected from the school's choir and a cappella group, and the curriculum focused on an excerpt from the Cantonese musical *Dalia,* specifically the song Love in Time, chosen for its cultural relevance and accessibility. Data collection included video recordings, student questionnaires, focus group interviews, teacher interviews, a researcher journal, and artifacts. Ethical considerations were addressed through permissions from the production company, school administration, and parents, collection of data from multiple sources, ensuring the study's validity and trustworthiness.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 build on this foundation. Chapter 4 documents the audition process, rehearsals, and teaching implementation. Chapter 5 focuses on the knowledge, skills, and personal growth students gained through their participation, while Chapter 6 examines the key elements of the collaborative model used in the project. Chapter 7 provides a conclusion and Recommendations for Professional Development.

CHAPTER 4

Producing and Staging *Dalia*

In Chapter 4, I provide details of the planning, execution, and outcomes of the *Dalia* project, conducted in collaboration with Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. I directed the project alongside the school's music teacher, Jason, who served as the administrative liaison and rehearsal assistant, and the extracurricular dance teacher, Evie, who managed the choreography. This chapter documents the timeline, challenges, strategies, and achievements of a collaborative musical theatre project within an educational setting.

Planning and Preparation

Communication with School Staff

The initial preparatory work primarily focused on communicating with the music teachers and administrative staff. Before the project was implemented, I clarified my intention with the school administration and staff, including the reasons for inviting the Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau to work together with me on the production. I contacted the Director of the school's extracurricular activities, Raymond Chan. After my explained the project, Raymond thought it would be meaningful for the students and aligned with the school's development goals. He gave verbal approval for the project and suggested that I draft a formal project proposal to submit to the school principal. He also mentioned that the students' understanding of and performance abilities in musical theatre were at a relatively basic level. Therefore, he recommended selecting less challenging scripts and songs to reduce the difficulty of learning and to enhance the students' experience.

Collaborative Model

Building a production team is crucial when organizing a musical theatre project. As the music teacher at the school, Jason became a core member of the team throughout the entire project. She assisted me in managing the teaching plan, communicated with the school

administration, booked classroom rehearsals, helped with classroom management, and assisted with some musical content during rehearsals. Carmon, the head of the music department, served as my advisor to assist with communication and with the management and review of the consent form. I invited Evie, the choreographer's assistant in the original *Dalia* to be the dance teacher for the project. She was a good fit for the project since she also teaches Chinese traditional dance at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau and was familiar with both the original production and the students' abilities in music and theatre. Additionally, alumnus Lekhang participated as a technical advisor in lighting and sound.

Student Participants

After receiving the principal's approval, I communicated regularly with the two music teachers Jason and Carmon regarding the selection of students to participate and the rehearsal schedule. We reached a consensus that the project should align with the school's activities calendar and build a professional expertise and performance experience for the school musical theatre competition for 11th-grade students. Therefore, most of the invited students were from grades 7th-11th, with only three 12th-grade students being invited due to their suitability for certain roles and their potential to take on significant roles. After finalizing the rehearsal schedule and the rehearsal rooms, I sent audition invitations and preparation guidelines to 24 students via WeChat groups.

Due to students' participation in different extracurricular activities, I coordinated with the music teachers to schedule two different audition dates: May 22 from 17:30-18:30 and May 23 from 13:15-14:00. The students were asked to prepare a self-selected pop song of around one minute and a Cantonese monologue from the character Angelo, the main character in the play.

***Auditions for* Dalia**

The auditions were held in the school music room on May 22-23. Prior to individual auditions I explained the content of the entire project and the specific rehearsal schedule to the students and invited them to participate in the project. Then each of the 12 boys and 10 girls took turns to perform at the front of the classroom while others waited at their desks. Music teacher Jason and I served as judges, marking evaluations of each student's performance based on the audition rubric in Appendix A.

The audition was divided into four parts: First, Jason and I confirmed with the students whether they could attend the rehearsal and the final recording. Next, to assist in role assignment, we asked if they had other talents besides singing, such as dancing or martial arts. Then, the students sang a self-selected song and read a piece of dialogue from the show, *Dalia*. Finally, in order to evaluate students' physical coordination abilities, students learned a short and simple choreographed sequence under my guidance. Jason and I recorded each student's availability, vocal type, preferred types of roles, and assessed their performance skills and special talents on the audition rubric form. This information facilitated the allocation of roles.

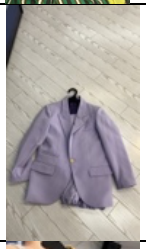
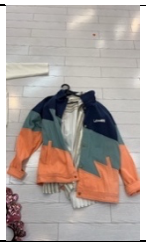
Role Assignment

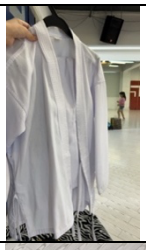
Based on their performance in the audition, I discussed the distribution of roles with the teachers, Carmon and Jason. We considered each student's audition using these criteria: 1) past artistic experience, performance skills level and abilities. 2) music classroom performance at school, and 3) compatibility of the role with the student's personality and appearance.

The role assignment sheet, along with the sheet music and a recording of the song's thematic sections, was posted in the WeChat groups the day before rehearsals.

Figure 4.1

Dalia's Cast and Costume Information

	Cast	Students	Costume
1	Angelo	Boy from 11th grade	CKppella costume below+black leather shoes 
2	Dalia	Girl from 10th grade	 White T-shirt+black trousers
3	Billy	Boy from 7th grade	 + black leather shoes
4	Will	Boy from 10th grade	 + Blue Jeans + White sports shoes
5	Uncle	Boy from 10th grade	 White vest / sweatpants
6	Nate	Boy from 12th grade	 + Jeans OR black trousers + white sports shoes

7	Kimoto	Boy from 11th grade	 + White shoes + white vest / bring his martial arts outfit
8	Mr. M&M	Boy from 7th grade	 Black t-shirt + black trousers + white sports shoes 
9	Mr. M&M assistant 1	Girl from 10th grade	 + white sports shoes
10	Mr. M&M assistant 2	Girl from 8th grade	 + white sports shoes
11	Chorus (9)	1 boy from 7th grade 3 boys from 8th grade 1 girl from 8th grade 1 girl from 9th grade 3 girls from 10th grade	Black choir t-shirt + black trousers + white sports shoes
	20 in total		

At the same time, an official consent form with the school stamp was issued to the student to obtain parental consent to participate in the *Dalia* project. After carefully reviewing the rehearsal schedule, two students informed us that they were unable to

participate in the project due to their preparation for other subject competitions scheduled at the same time.

Costume

For costume selection, I used the original *Dalia* costumes as a reference and borrowed most of the lead characters' costumes from TDSM Dance Studio. However, for items like pants, where height differences were an issue, students were asked to bring similar clothing that aligned with the original character design and costume style to assess suitability. Due to limited funding, purchasing additional costumes for the chorus was not feasible. To address this, I consulted with the music teacher, Jason, about finding a coordinated yet casual outfit. Fortunately, both extracurricular music groups had a designated purple T-shirt for performances, which students paired with their own black pants.

Rehearsal Description and Process

There were eight rehearsals, starting with music, followed by drama, and then dance, progressing from aspects most familiar to students to least familiar to them. Although the students were a little shy at first, they improved steadily in their performance skills and their self-confidence increased rapidly. The students' passion for the musical project and their level of participation far exceeded my expectations.

Rehearsal 1, Sunday, May 26, 09:30-12:30

The three-hour rehearsal was sufficient for a first rehearsal. It was divided into three sections. In section one I provided students with an introduction and overview of the project. I welcomed and thanked everyone for their participation, explained the project's content, goals, and rough rehearsal plan. Then, we moved into the formal rehearsal stage. I explained the story outline of *Dalia*, and the background storyline of the performance excerpt, Love in Time, and I played the original excerpt performance video and the composer's original song

demo. After explaining the general scenes and character motivations to the students, the ten-minute video was played again so they could understand the motives of their characters.

In section two, we sight-read the music and learned the vocal parts. After dividing the students into their vocal parts, they learned the main theme section. Since the dance for the theme section needed to be learned during the following rehearsal, the students had to be very familiar with the vocal part. At the same time, I invited Jason to help the individual solo singers follow the audio and sheet music to go over their solo parts in a music classroom next door.

In section three of the rehearsal, we concentrated on drama. I distributed the script of the excerpt Love in Time and conducted three rounds of table reads, followed by an additional read-through accompanied by the lead audio. Before concluding the session, I guided the students through a preliminary blocking exercise, providing them with a general understanding of their positions on stage.

During the first rehearsal, one girl informed us that her family would be relocating to Hong Kong in two weeks, requiring her to leave Macau. Another student withdrew from the project after one of their parents, citing academic concerns, decided against their participation upon receiving the consent letter. Additionally, before audition officially began, Carmon informed me that two more students would be unable to take part. Consequently, out of the originally invited 24 students, only 20 fully participated in both the rehearsals and the final recording.

Rehearsal 2: **Tuesday, May 28, 13:15-14:00**

My original plan was for Evie, the dance teacher to lead the session, but due to her contracting COVID, she could not come to the school according to the regulations of the Education Bureau. We decided that switching to Zoom dance lessons was not an ideal plan for students learning a new and unfamiliar field of activity. Therefore, the plan was changed

to focus on the vocal part at first. Although the students already had a basic understanding of the song, they were mostly singing along with the recording, and there might be some deviation. If we could practice according to the sheet music, that would be more accurate. This became an opportunity to meticulously refine the vocal part.

We started working carefully on the spacing of students on stage. While determining their positions, I also explained to the students why they needed to move to certain positions. Furthermore, the relationships between the characters were clarified. As students memorized the movements and positions, they were also gaining a deeper understanding of their characters.

Rehearsal 3: **Thursday, May 30, 13:15-14:00**

Since the dance instructor, Evie, remained in COVID status, we started the drama section of the characters' parts and added some easy physical movements, like Kimoto's ensemble.

Although students had developed a basic understanding of the characters, there was a certain difficulty in transferring from understanding the characters to acting their parts in performance. Therefore, I found that watching and analyzing the original performance together under my guidance was an effective way for middle school students to learn the drama quickly. At the same time, I kept reminding them to review the content in their free time since this was a new challenge with a large amount of information imparted in each rehearsal, and that they needed to take responsibility for their roles.

Rehearsal 4: **Saturday, June 1, 14:00-17:30**

Dance teacher Evie completed COVID rehabilitation and returned to our team. We spent two hours learning the theme dance. Only three students had prior dancing experience. Therefore, after discussing the situation with Evie, we decided to make the dance moves a little simpler to fit students' capacity and experience. Each movement was broken down into body motions; hand, foot, and head movements were introduced slowly in the teaching process.

Each part was explained separately before combining them. The students were very excited to try dancing, especially the girls. Some of the boys felt shy and they teased each other to cover up their shyness. Jason and I kept encouraging them to be confident, reminding them that they all looked great.

We also worked on the drama part after the dance section and rehearsed the whole of the excerpt two times and kept reminding students to memorize their part. In the meantime, we postponed our recording day. Due to Evie's physical condition and the boys' having to cancel one of the rehearsal days to participate in a school performance, after communicating with the school administration, we added two rehearsals and rescheduled the filming to occur one week later, on June 16. The number of rehearsals increased from the initial six to a total of eight.

Rehearsal 5: **Tuesday, June 4, 13:15-14:00**

I reviewed the dance moves, guiding students by breaking down the dance steps first and then connecting the movements, starting with slow motion, and gradually speeding up. Adolescent girls often feel a sense of awkwardness when using their bodies to express themselves. Boys tend to warm up more slowly and need some time to transition from a playful state to a serious rehearsal mode. Therefore, in addition to directly addressing the physical movements, the psychological characteristics of adolescence were considered.

We rehearsed the acting parts in segments and focused on Angelo, Dalia, Nate, and Will. Although the students were already quite familiar with the designated positions, they still needed the teachers to adjust their body posture and to keep reminding them of the motivation behind each movement. At the same time, we needed to remind students that their body posture during performances should differ from their daily lives. For example, they should maintain an upright posture, open their shoulders, avoid turning their backs to the audience, and be conscious of not blocking their peers with their bodies.

Rehearsal 6: **Thursday, June 6, 13:15-14:00**

All the boys needed to participate in the school's art salon event during the lunch period, so only the girls stayed behind to practice. It was a good time to do small group physical training. The time was handed over to Evie to coach the girls on their group dance movements, with special attention to teaching the detailed jazz steps for Mr. M&M's two assistants, and the two girls who were carrying chairs at the beginning of the scene. Since I didn't have a strong dance background and only girls were called that day, there was little need for additional classroom management. After discussing the teaching focus with Ms. Evie, I learned the movements alongside the students so that if Ms. Evie was unavailable, I could guide students based on her instructions. This also helped me understand students' difficulties and challenges during the dance performance, allowing me to make timely adjustments.

Rehearsal 7: **Sunday, June 9, 10:00-13:00**

I removed the script from students' view and had them follow the background music track without any guidance, allowing them to feel the rhythm of the lines to fit with the music. A run-through with the music only came first, followed by a full run-through, adjustment, and a run-through again. Students needed more practice time to achieve rhythmic control. But the overall feeling was great; students were in a position where they were ready to perform.

From the early stages of rehearsal, we began communicating with the students about the costumes for the characters and I developed a costume chart (see Figure 4.1). Fortunately, the original production company retained most of the costumes after the performance and agreed to lend them to us for free, which significantly reduced our costume expenses. For sneakers or jeans, we decided to ask students to provide their own from home. As for the chorus, since it was difficult to borrow a large number of costumes, after a discussion with

the music teachers, we decided that chorus members would wear the school's choir blue T-shirts on top and black pants on the bottom.

Alumnus and technician leader Lekhang Leung came to the school to observe this rehearsal. Together we developed a microphone plan based on the existing auditorium equipment. Since the school's auditorium setup could not support more than 8 microphones, we proposed the following microphone allocation plan based on the following two considerations. 1) Students who had more physical movement were prioritized for using clip microphones; 2) Due to the school's outdated sound system, the belt pack wireless microphones were often unstable and prone to intermittent disruptions. For safety reasons, we prioritized assigning the slightly more stable microphones to the main characters with more lines.

Figure 4.2

Original Mic List

Cast	Microphone
Angelo	Handheld 1
Dalia	Clip 1
Billy	Clip 2
Uncle	Clip 3
Kimoto	Clip 4
M&M	Handheld 2
Assistant	Handheld 2
Assistant	Handheld 3
Will	Handheld 4
Nate	Clip 2 (changed after)

Rehearsal 8: **Tuesday, June 11, 13:15-14:00**

Due to the significant improvement in the girls' dance performance in rehearsal 7, we hoped that the boys could also have a focused session to allow Evie to make detailed adjustments to their movements. Her rehearsal of the boys' dance was particularly focused on the movement of characters Mr. M&M, Billy, and the two chorus boys who acted to carry chairs onto the stage at the beginning of the excerpts.

During this final rehearsal, I truly experienced that changing a physical movement can indeed alter students' confidence. With careful adjustments, the boys were becoming increasingly confident and charismatic!

Recording *Dalia:* Sunday, June 16, 09:00-13:00

I invited a costume designer, Bunny, to assist me with the shooting. She helped me follow up with the costume list for each participant. The process wasn't complex since we worked with only one excerpt, with no quick changes of costume. I asked Rabbit to bring some disinfectant spray, a sewing kit, and safety pins to the recording session as a precaution.

Additionally, due to our reluctant decision to postpone the recording day, alumnus technician Lekhang, who had other work commitments that day, arrived late. Therefore, we asked his reliable partner, Miu, to help with the audio technician's responsibilities. Miu had some audio experience with a band show, and we felt very grateful for his assistance. Evie also attended on the recording day, assisting me with the GoPro recording and adjusting some dance movements.

The costume fitting on the day started at 09:00. From 09:00 to 09:30, the main characters tried on their costumes. From 09:30 to 10:00, the chorus set up and made costume adjustments for everyone while practicing their parts with their costumes. At 10:00, we did a run-through until Miu and Jason had adjusted the sound system in the auditorium. The students and I arrived at the auditorium at 10:30 to start testing the microphones. However, the wireless microphone sound system was unexpectedly unstable. We had to adjust the arrangement of the wireless and handheld microphones urgently. With the change of our microphone settings, we also needed to adjust some of the physical movements to make handheld microphones more reasonable. Despite these adjustments, we still spent a lot of time dealing with disconnectivity issues with the wireless sound system. Our updated microphone list was shown below:

Figure 4.3

Updated Mic list

Cast	Microphone
Angelo	Handheld 1
Dalia	Handheld 2
Billy	Clip 1
Uncle	Handheld 3
Kimoto	Handheld 4
M&M	none
Assistant	Handheld 3
Assistant	Handheld 4
Will	Clip 2
Nate	Clip 3

Due to the unstable wireless audio system, we recorded five times in total, constantly trying different positions, changing batteries, and adjusting the placement of the receiver with stickers, all in hopes of stabilizing the wireless audio system. I appreciated the students' serious cooperation. Repeating a continuous ten-minute segment five times was a significant test of their patience and stamina, but everyone was very earnest and cooperative, which touched me deeply.

I also took advantage of the time spent waiting for technical adjustments to upload a Questionnaire for everyone to complete. The Questionnaire aimed to gather insights into students' understanding of the musical *Dalia* and their feelings and suggestions about the rehearsal process. Additionally, I invited everyone to join me in school on the following Tuesday, June 18 for a small celebration of our work and to enjoy pizza and fried chicken together.

Celebration

During the gathering to celebrate held in a school classroom, I thanked everyone for their hard work during rehearsals. We shared a meal and shared stories about the show. I invited four students divided into two groups to have focus group interviews outside the

classroom, each lasting 10-15 minutes. Four students, including two boys and two girls were selected. One girl was the female lead character, and the other was a chorus member; they were both 10th-grade students. The boys I selected were two side cast members; one was an 11th-grade student with previous musical theatre experience, and the other was a 7th-grade student who had never been involved in any musical theatre before. These four students represented different levels of experience and backgrounds in musical theatre performance. Further details will be provided in Chapter 5.

Summary

Chapter 4 of the project narrative details the planning, coordination, and implementation of staging the musical *Dalia* at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. Preparations began in January, with the author securing performance rights and forming a collaborative team with school staff and specialists. Key partners included music teacher Jason, advisor Carmon, and choreographer Evie, who collectively worked together on auditions, rehearsals, and logistical needs. Auditions involved 22 talented students, followed by eight carefully stuctured rehearsals that focused on vocal training, character development, and choreography, all tailored to the students' skill levels. Challenges arose, including COVID-related adjustments and technical difficulties with audio equipment, which required flexibility in plans. On the day of the recording, the team recorded multiple takes to address microphone stability, with the students showing dedication throughout. The project concluded with a celebration and focus group interviews, where students reflected on their experiences, marking a rewarding end to the project.

CHAPTER 5

Students' Learning and Growth in the Musical Theatre Project: From Skills to Personal Development

The primary goal of this study was to explore the impact of musical theatre education on students' performance skills, and personal development, and to assess the use of a collaborative and interdisciplinary model to implement the project. The purpose was to examine an approach to teaching the Cantonese musical, *Dalia* as an extracurricular activity at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. In this chapter, I focus on the research question: What knowledge, skills, and personal growth did students gain during the project?

I collected data through five channels: teachers' interviews, student focus group interviews, questionnaires, rehearsal videos, and my reflection journal. I analyzed the data through coding for students' prior knowledge, their reporting of personal growth, teachers' perceptions of student growth, and students' responses about the rehearsal process and the project. The goal was to examine students' learning and development within the *Dalia* project.

Students' Prior Experience with Musical Theatre

To compare as accurately as possible students' learning outcomes in the *Dalia* project, it was essential to understand their prior experience with musical theatre. In the questionnaires administered to all students, two questions focused on their musical theatre background: one investigated how many musical theatre performances the students had participated in prior to *Dalia*, and the other explored their experiences watching musicals outside of school.

According to the data, approximately 80% of students never participated in a musical, 15% participated once, and 5% participated two or more times. For most students, their participation in the *Dalia* project was their first experience with a musical theatre

performance. The students who reported prior experience in musical theatre likely participated in the school's class musical competition. For the students who never participated in the school's class musical competition, this was their first musical theatre experience. In the focus group interview, three students who never participated in musical theatre reported that musical theatre felt more attainable than they had previously thought. They expressed confidence that they would perform even better in the 11th-grade mini musical theatre competition.

Turning to students' previous experiences watching musicals outside of school, approximately 30% of students indicated no exposure to musicals. In contrast, 70% of students responded that they sometimes watch musicals, but their viewing frequency was not high. They may have watched popular musical movies like *The Lion King* or *Frozen*, or remembered that they saw musicals at school performed by educational touring theatre groups. Additionally, they might have viewed some official recordings of musicals like *Dear Evan Hansen* through streaming platforms (such as Netflix or Disney+). No students indicated that they watched musicals regularly. This could be related to time constraints, financial factors, or a lack of information about musical theatre in their community.

In summary, although most students lacked participation in musical theatre, the growth of streaming platforms made them somewhat familiar with it. They had a vague impression of musical theatre, which provided a promising starting point for participation in *Dalia.*

Development of Understanding and Skills

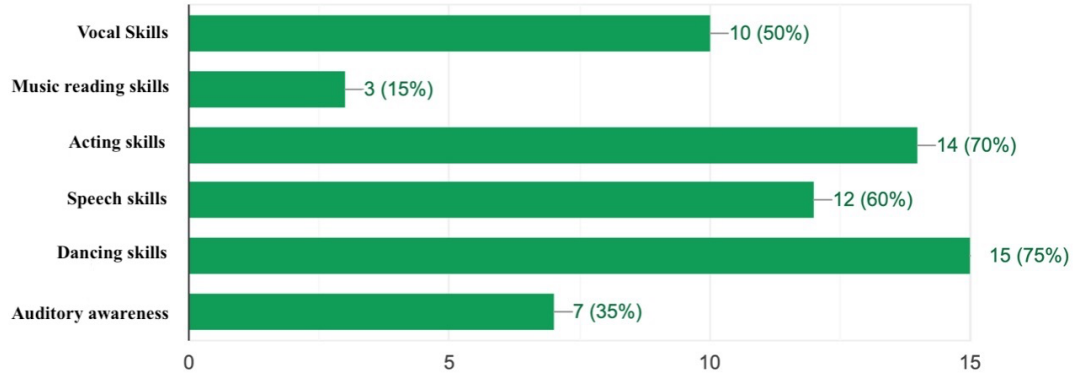
Based on their experience in *Dalia*, when students responded to the question regarding what kind of art forms make up musical theatre, 100% of students circled dance, 95% of students circled music, and 95% of students circled drama. This response showed students’ basic understanding of musical theatre and suggested they view musical theatre as

an integrated art form. Two students chose only two art forms; these students may have had a deeper interest in, or understanding of, specific art forms. 100% of students circled dance, indicating that they had a strong impression of the dance component of musical theatre, and expected dance to be part of the *Dalia* performance. This finding was confirmed during the focus group interview with students after the recording. The students expressed that they were particularly impressed by the dancing, as it was the first time for most of them to engage with dance. Teacher Carmon also thought that "the students' excitement about dance motivated them to invest time and try new things."

Students were asked about growth in performance skills they believed they gained from the musical theatre program. Their responses are represented as follows:

Figure 5.1

Students' Perception of Their Growth in Performance Skills



The data indicated that for 75% of students learning in dance left a deep impression. This was not surprising, as musical theatre often incorporates rich dance elements, allowing participants to enhance their physical coordination and performance expression. Student D shared, "I observed one of our teammates initially struggled to coordinate their limbs and felt quite stiff while trying out the dance; he ultimately performed the dance sequence smoothly through hard work and practice." Student C mentioned that "most of the boys had never danced before ... especially when it came to singing and dancing simultaneously. Even

though it's only twenty seconds, you have to practice the movement very well to manage both aspects effectively.” Two female students shared that dancing was a novel experience for them. Although Student B mentioned having tried some traditional Chinese dance as a child, the experience of dancing hip-hop felt fresh and exciting, almost like “being a K-pop idol.” She reflected on her journey from struggling to remember the moves in the first lesson to experiencing significant improvement through consistent practice, which made her feel a real sense of progress.

Both music teachers also expressed their admiration for the students' growth in stage performance during the interview. Music teacher, Jason, mentioned:

> At first, I didn’t have much confidence in their physical movement. Normally, if you ask them to go left or right, they might get confused about the sequence. So, I was really surprised to see them perform a complete dance routine under the guidance of the dance teacher.

Teacher Carmon also mentioned the students' progress in both dance and acting:

> I hadn’t seen them dance or act before, so I thought everyone was quite shy and reserved. Many students have this trait, but after seeing this performance, I realized that they could all be so bold on stage. It was actually quite nerve-wracking, and I was really surprised by how freely they expressed themselves in the musical. I think some of the middle school students are really talented, after all.

Seventy percent of students who chose acting skills as an area of growth reflected on their perceived notable advancements in role-playing, emotional expression, and script comprehension. Student C mentioned that even though his lines consisted of just two words, he needed to deliver them with confidence and power. This was in stark contrast to his naturally reserved personality. However, with the teacher's guidance on body language and vocal projection, he reminded himself to engage confidently in his acting role on stage. On

the day of the recording of *Dalia*, he was wearing a coat and sunglasses to help him connect more with the character, making him feel “cool” and capable of delivering an even better performance. Student A, describing her experience in rehearsals, shared:

> During the rehearsal process, I found that the students seemed to be different from what I thought I knew them to be. They worked very hard to get into the roles, and their acting skills made me get to know everyone again.

Student A perceived her fellow students changing and learning more about each other’s personal capacity. Student D believed himself to be naturally introverted and rarely expressed himself, so he felt challenged from his acting role at the beginning. In the interview, he emphasized that fully immersing himself in the character was essential. He stressed the importance of being bold and not worrying about others' opinions, encouraging himself to truly become the character:

> The key was to act boldly, focusing on how to interpret the character and bring it to life. What mattered most was how you see the character without worrying about what others think; other people's opinions do not define whether the character is good or bad. What mattered most was having faith in your performance. It was best if you believed you would perform well.

The data show that approximately 60% of students believed that participating in the *Dalia* project improved their speech skills. Actors must deliver their lines clearly to ensure the audience can easily comprehend them (Click, 2024). During the rehearsals and performances of the musical, I dedicated significant time to working on their dialogue projection. The three main articulators in singing and speech are the lip, teeth and tongue (Davids & LaTour, 2020). Although microphones were used in the final recording, I still focused on helping them enhance articulation by adjusting tongue positioning and lip movement during rehearsals. Additionally, I guided them in analyzing their characters' lines

and the subtext behind the text to improve their accuracy and emotional expression. As a teacher and a director, I hope to enhance students' understanding and practical application of speech through the comprehensive training offered by musical theatre. I believe this kind of speech skills development will help them in their daily life and future career.

The data showed that 50% of students selected vocal skills as their perceived area of growth, indicating that participants were aware of some progress in singing and pitch accuracy. Since the students participating in the project were invited from the school choir and the a cappella group, they already possessed rich vocal performance experience. However, the vocal repertoire and style of the musical primarily focused on pop music, which was not part of their previous choir experience which consisted mostly of art songs and religious pieces. As a result, they needed to adapt to the singing style of musical theatre. Student B mentioned that I (Teacher Lin) taught them various vocal techniques such as singing as if they were speaking and demonstrating songs for them to mimic. These techniques helped them quickly achieve the desired vocal quality. Student D noted that, unlike singing in the choir, musical theatre required a greater emphasis on conveying emotions and expressing the character's feelings. He continued: “When I think about my singing parts, the range is quite low, but I need to sing with a passionate vibe, like a Japanese animation theme song. This is different from the interpretation of typical pop songs”. Furthermore, musical theatre songs frequently advance the storyline, with lyrics that convey essential details about the characters, making it crucial to ensure the articulation is clear (Casado, 2017). Therefore, during the rehearsal process, students were always reminded to pay attention to the position of their lips and teeth as well as their tongues. It helped the students to project their voice clearly and with ease.

Thirty-five percent of students chose auditory awareness as a primary area of growth, indicating that their sensitivity to music and rhythm had improved during the rehearsals.

Because singing, dancing, and drama needed to line up well with the recorded music that accompanied them, students needed to be highly attuned to it. Only three students chose music reading skills, indicating a lower dependence on and experience with music reading during rehearsals.

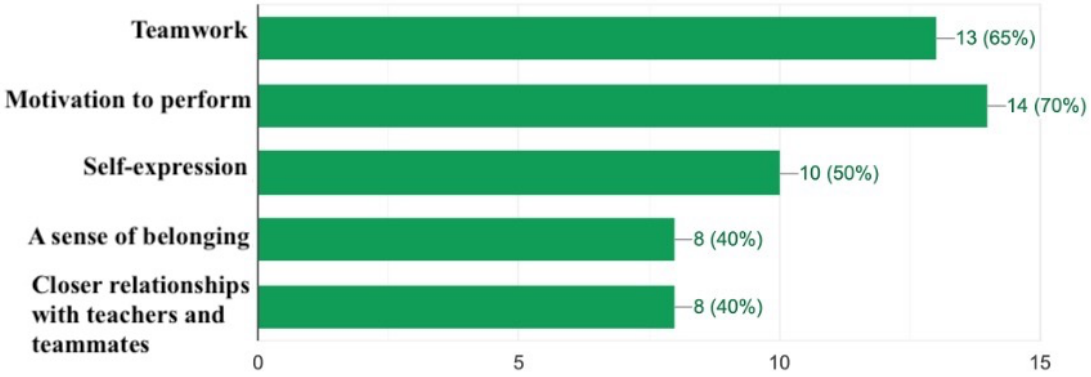
Overall, the analysis of the performance skills they gained from the musical theatre program showed that dance, drama, and speech skills were the most recognized areas by the students.

Personal Growth

While the artistry of performance was undoubtedly significant in the students' musical theatre experience, similar to Wadler's (2022) findings, the life skills students developed through this project were equally valuable. Besides performance skills, I also analyzed students' responses related to personal growth during the *Dalia* project.

Figure 5.2

Students' Perceptions of Personal Growth



Seventy percent of students selected "motivation to perform" in their survey responses. This response was also evident in interviews. Students mentioned that participating in *Dalia* made them feel more confident on stage. They all expressed a desire to participate continually if there was a *Dalia* project 2.0 next year, wanting to perform more from the musical, *Dalia,* or explore other roles. Student A, who played the lead role of Dalia,

stated that after this experience, she felt confident about participating in next year's school musical competition and was no longer afraid of playing the lead. She was eager to take on the role and would like to help her peers to understand and connect with their characters. Student B reflected on her experience during the recording day, noting that she realized musical theatre required a combination of various resources and skills. She was interested in learning more about lighting and sound technology in the future. For many students, the *Dalia* project motivated them to pursue performance actively. Music teacher Jason shared:

> I think what has changed most for the boys, in terms of their singing style, is their willingness to step forward and perform solos. Normally, in a cappella, they mainly sing harmonies. However, when they were given specific roles this time, they were eager to take the stage and sing solo segments. I see this as a significant breakthrough for them.

Jason also highlighted in her interview the importance of encouragement when teachers are faced with students who are unfamiliar with the field, stating:

> During their performances, we would often say, "Wow, that was great!" or suggest that they could incorporate their ideas into the character. In acting, there's a lot of give-and-take improvisation. We also provided them with encouragement and validation, which naturally boosted their confidence in the final presentation.

Sara Lazarus (as cited in O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024), an educator from Circle in the Square Theatre, emphasized the importance of seeing each student as a unique individual and celebrating their distinct qualities. She believes that the primary goal of theatre educators should be to highlight and nurture what makes each student special. While teachers should share their knowledge, skills and guidance, it is ultimately up to the students to integrate what they have learned from a variety of sources and work out what works best for them. Lazarus underscores the transformative power of encouragement in helping students navigate

unfamiliar territory, emphasizing how positive reinforcement and validation can boost students' confidence and creativity. By fostering a supportive environment, teachers can empower students to embrace their unique ideas and explore improvisation as a collaborative, expressive process.

Additionally, in both survey and interview responses, students shared that they had improved their teamwork skills. Australian educator Tyran Parke (as cited in O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024), highlighted that musical theatre inherently involves collaboration, with group dance classes, ensemble singing, and highly cooperative productions. In contrast to opera, which often emphasizes one-on-one coaching, the entire process of musical theatre is significantly more collaborative. Student B mentioned that musical theatre involved a significant amount of teamwork; it was not enough for just one person to excel. He said:

> Everyone must work together, from synchronizing the dance to collaborating on the acting. Additionally, unlike filming a short video, which can be paused and edited, a musical theatre performance typically required a continuous performance. Therefore, even when mistakes happened, they needed to be understanding of each other, offering comfort and encouragement while believing that everyone could improve next time.

This demonstrated that during rehearsals and performances, Student B learned how to collaborate with others and work together towards common goals. This area of personal growth would be helpful for students' future social lives. Dance teacher Evie also addressed collaboration among students:

> I felt that the students encouraged each other and offered suggestions. For example, friends might have told him, "You could improve this part," or given him other feedback after the rehearsal. This showed that they cared for one another, learned together, and progressed as a group. Additionally, since musical theatre was a

> collaborative art form, everyone drew energy from each other and shared it back. As a result, the improvement of teamwork skills came naturally.

Fifty percent of students reported growth in self-expression, indicating that musical theatre provided a platform for students to express themselves freely and help them better understand and convey their emotions and thoughts. Actors perform better in environments where their voices are heard and respected. Offering students opportunities to express themselves, empathize, and engage in problem-solving fosters a strong sense of agency (Click, 2024). Student A and Student B shared that musical theatre offered everyone a chance to express themselves confidently and boldly through their characters, enabling them to explore things they typically attempt. They noted that performing segments where they sang and danced simultaneously was a considerable challenge, but once they overcame that hurdle, the experience of singing and dancing on stage brought them immense joy, making them feel as if they had discovered a whole new side of themselves. In the later phase of rehearsals, they reported, they began to improvise lines and they were able to better express their understanding of the role.

Forty percent of students selected a sense of belonging, reflecting that they felt support and recognition as members of the team, thus enhancing their identity within the group. Students foster a sense of belonging through the shared experience of challenging rehearsals (Ryan, 2014). Student B mentioned that dancing with a team was less intimidating than dancing alone. It encouraged "a sense of boldness as everyone sweated together, faced challenges, and created shared memories." Additionally, Carmon explained:

> Most students don't enjoy doing things alone—practicing or performing alone. I've noticed that they really like doing things as a group. So, when they were engaged in something fresh together, they put in a lot of effort, which was quite moving to see.

She also asserted that “the musical has allowed them to embody a sense of ownership, encouraging them to fully invest in the task at hand and strive to excel. This commitment enhances the overall quality of the entire production.” This aligns with Marshall's (2016) view that when company members feel complete, safe, a sense of belonging, and self-worth, their personal needs are fulfilled, enabling them to fully commit to the performance.

“Closer relationships with teachers and teammates” was chosen by 40% of students, signifying that the *Dalia* project not only enhanced artistic skills but also promoted interaction and trust between teachers and peers, fostering closer relationships. Student K remarked that the teacher's guidance made the rehearsals more organized and efficient compared to the earlier student-led efforts. At the very least, attendance improved significantly, underscoring that effective leadership is a key component of strong teamwork.

In summary, in the area of personal growth, motivation to continue to perform and teamwork skills were the areas most recognized by the students. These findings suggest improved social skills, communication abilities, and interpersonal relationship management through participation in musical theatre, which would help students feel more confident in future social situations.

Overall Impression of the *Dalia* project

Students were asked, "How would you describe this project to others?" as an open-ended question which allowed students to respond freely. Student responses are divided into enjoyment, creativity, and recommendations. Nine students mentioned that the project was "fun," "interesting," "worth a try," or simply "good," indicating that participants enjoyed the project, which enhanced their sense of engagement. Feedback such as "innovative and entertaining" and "in line with modern standards" showed that students recognized the creativity of the project and its contemporary relevance. Some feedback, like "it's a great

opportunity for training, highly recommended," indicated that students were willing to recommend the project to others, reflecting a high level of satisfaction with the program.

When asked if they would like to participate in a second phase of the *Dalia* project, all four students who were interviewed expressed their eagerness to join. Student D stated that she would be the first to sign up, while adding, "I'd tell people that this musical is a great experience—a chance to relax and make friends. We're not just doing it because the teacher told us to; we genuinely want to enjoy ourselves and learn."

Summary

Chapter 5 explored students' performance skill learning and personal growth through their involvement in the *Dalia* musical theatre project. It highlighted how students developed skills in dance, acting, and vocal performance since many of them had little prior experience of performing musical theatre. Teachers and students noted significant gains in confidence, teamwork, and self-expression, with students reporting a renewed motivation to perform and a deeper appreciation for musical theatre as an integrated art form. Reflections reveal high levels of engagement and enjoyment, with many students eager to participate further, recognizing the project as a valuable opportunity for both personal and artistic growth.

CHAPTER 6

A Collaborative Model for Musical Theatre Education

Musical theatre is a dynamic and comprehensive art form that integrates music, drama, and dance, offering students a unique platform for creative expression and collaborative learning, regardless of geographical location. This chapter explores the implementation of a collaborative model for musical theatre education, and it offers insights into how educators and artists can work together to create learning experiences that develop students' skills in music, drama, and dance. I focus on the second research question: What are the key elements of an effective collaborative model for implementing a musical theatre project in a secondary school?

Drawing from interviews with teachers and school administrators, rehearsal videos, personal reflection journals and related literature, this chapter outlines the strategies and key elements used to foster communication and collaboration in a school-based musical theatre project. By examining the collaborative structures and communication frameworks employed in the project, I seek to highlight practices for integrating musical theatre into educational settings.

Key Elements

Each context and setting is unique, and the implementation of musical theatre in schools varies due to differences in educational resources, administrative structures, funding, the musical background of students, and the pedagogical experience of teachers and artists (Rajan, 2019). Additionally, the collaborative model required for this interdisciplinary art form influences the dynamics among schools, teachers, parents, and collaborating artists or theatre groups. Moreover, since the music director, conductor and music teachers are involved in almost every aspect of the production, it is essential that they are fully integrated

into the production team and actively participate in all stages of planning and execution (Marshall, 2016).

Based on practical experience, I have identified several key elements of -collaboration that were found in the *Dalia* project and that can be applied to different contexts: communication (establishing smooth communication channels among teachers, students, parents, and administrators to ensure alignment), artist-centered cooperation (emphasizing role specialization to allow participants to contribute their strengths effectively), and a spiral curriculum approach to learning (guiding students progressively from familiar elements, building their skills and confidence step by step). Furthermore, cultivating a learning community highlights the importance of teachers and students participating in the learning process together. This not only motivates students but also strengthens the bond between them and their teachers. Flexibility, on the other hand, is crucial for addressing unforeseen circumstances. By adjusting resources or modifying plans, using flexible strategies to ensure the smooth progress of the project. These elements provide educators with valuable insights and clear guidance for promoting musical theatre education in schools.

Communication

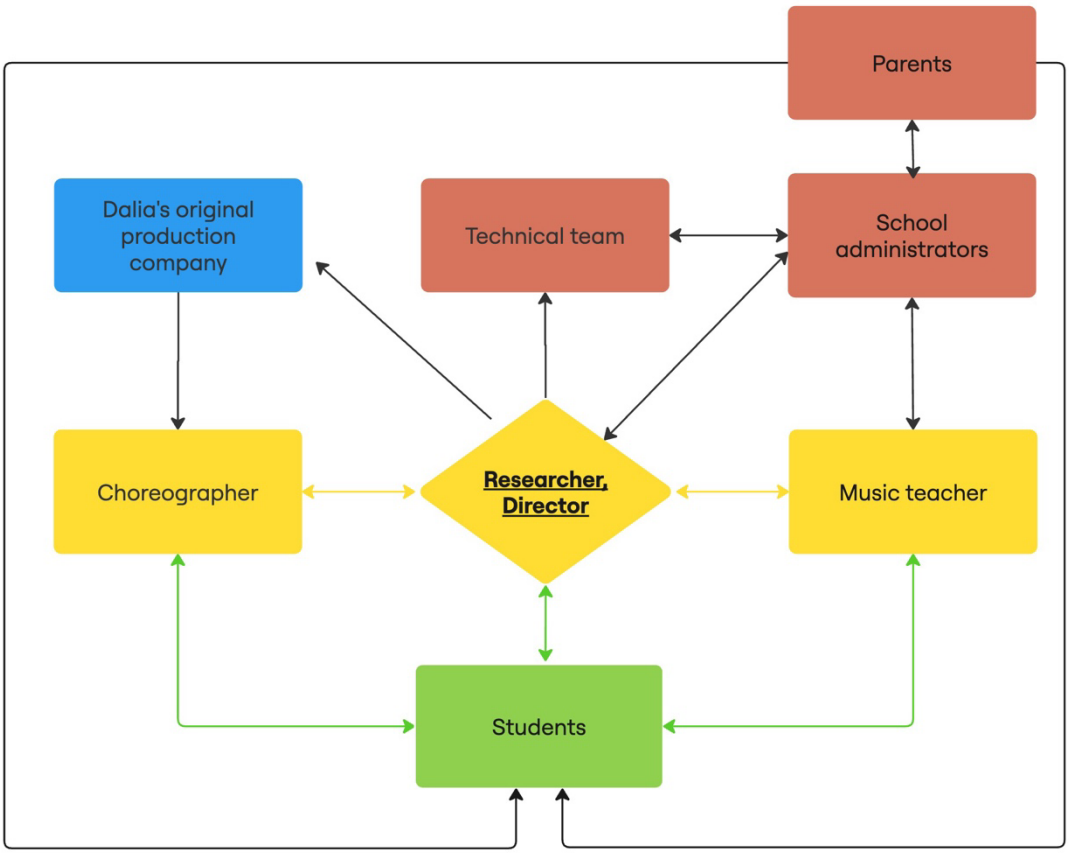
As a comprehensive art form, musical theatre involves collaboration across performance, music, dance, and technology. Even in the form of a student project, it is far more complex than regular extracurricular music activities such as choir, band or orchestra. In this project, I acted in a pivotal role as the central coordinator, bridging school administrators, choreographers, music teachers, technical teams, and students. Figure 6.1 illustrates my central role (researcher/teaching-artist) as the communication hub, connecting various departments such as the technical team, choreographer, music teacher, school administrators, and students. To ensure smooth communication, the researcher/teaching-artist

must act as a mediator, aligning goals and ensuring that information flows efficiently across all channels.

The connection between the music teacher, drama teacher, choreographer, and students forms the foundation of the entire program, as they directly influence student engagement and performance. Similarly, teachers and school administrators maintained open communication to keep families informed about the project's progress and address any concerns. With support from both school administrators and parents, students were able to focus on preparing for their performance. While this communication model simplifies the complexities of formal theatre productions, it still highlights the essence of musical theatre as a team-based art form.

Figure 6.1

Communication Model in this Study



Note. As a researcher, producer, curriculum planner, teacher, and director, I communicated directly with almost all departments, except for parents. This is because the school has an established communication protocol with families. Typically, if parents have any information to convey, they communicate with the school administrators or the class teacher, who then passes it on to external teachers.

Communication with the school administration began before the project started and continued through to the principal's interview following the students' performance. Before launching the project, I clarified my intentions with the school administration to confirm that Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau was interested in collaborating. I then reached out to Raymond, the extracurricular activities coordinator, to discuss the proposed activities. He verbally agreed and suggested I draft a formal project proposal for the principal, offering additional ideas and recommendations for the planned musical production.

While the school management may seem outside the core circle on Figure 6.1, Carmon, the head of the music department, played a key role in monitoring the program's development and offering valuable suggestions. She was actively involved in the WeChat group where I communicated with music teacher Jason and dance teacher Evie, ensuring that classroom arrangements and scheduling aligned with the school's existing lesson schedules. Meanwhile, the school administration served as a liaison between parents and me, helping explain the project details and addressing any special needs of the students.

The communication between the production company TDSM Dance Studio and the technical team, although seemingly on the periphery of the core process, played a crucial role. I personally addressed matters such as securing copyrights for performance segments and inviting alumni like Lekhang early in the planning stage through direct consultations and approvals. These apparently minor details are, in fact, indispensable components of the pre-production communication for the musical theatre project (Click, 2024). The production company ensured that all content complied with legal and copyright standards, while the technical team managed essential aspects like lighting and sound. This communication and

early confirmation process not only preempts potential issues but also significantly enhances the professionalism of both the teaching and the performance experience, and directly impacts the outcome of the final performance (Marshall, 2016).

On the recording day, which happened to fall on a Sunday, the school administrators were unable to attend. Therefore, I invited them to the final celebration, expressing my gratitude for the teachers' support of my project and sharing my impressions of the students' performances which exceeded my expectations and demonstrated their significant progress. I shared that I would compile a video of the students' performance at the end of the project and asked Carmon if she would be interested in being interviewed about the project.

As evident from the intricate web of communication among administrators, teachers, production company, technicians, parents, and students, effective communication is the cornerstone of a successful musical theatre project.

For music educators looking to produce a musical in a school setting, it is essential to develop a framework for multidimensional communication skills. As illustrated in Figure 6.1, they must act as a communication hub, coordinating the needs of administration, arts, and technology. Like a musical theater producer, educators must establish smooth communication channels between artistic vision, educational objectives, administrative regulations, and technical constraints to ensure seamless collaboration across departments.

Artist-centered Collaboration

The collaborative model used in *Dalia* was artist-centered, with the music teacher Jason as an assistant. As a teaching-artist outside of the school, I took the initiative to teach, drawing on my own theatre experiences to inform teaching methods. Leung (2018) found that the artist may also design the teaching and learning activities they find effective. In the production of *Dalia*, Jason acted as a class monitor, supporting me during instruction.

Initially, in this curriculum development study I planned to implement the collaborative model with parallel participation—where the music teacher and the guest artist-teacher (researcher) worked together in the musical theatre project *Dalia*, sharing teaching responsibilities in the classroom. However, in practice, the collaborative model evolved into an artist-centered approach, with the music teacher Jason taking on a supportive role as an assistant because the administrative and communication-related responsibilities were largely carried out outside of the rehearsal space. This shift occurred because the rehearsal process in *Dalia* prioritized performance elements, requiring the artist to lead the majority of instructional tasks. Furthermore, the students in this project had a relatively strong musical background, reducing the need for Jason's involvement in the rehearsals to the extent originally anticipated. As a result, rehearsal time focused more on drama and dance, rendering the ideal parallel participation model less applicable to this group of students.

For musical theatre collaboration, it is crucial to have a team of artists who provide timely inspiration, support, and honest feedback (Marshall, 2016). So, it is essential to build collaboration among teachers, to form an efficient teamwork model, ensuring that each educator can leverage their professional strengths. Jason took on the role of communicating with the school administration and coordinating rehearsals, similar to a typical musical producer. She was responsible for scheduling rehearsal times and securing venues, as well as ensuring the smooth progression of our activities. I handled music drama rehearsals, acting as the director and musical director, focusing on students' musical expression and acting skills. Additionally, I invited Evie from the original production team of *Dalia* to serve as the choreographer, responsible for designing the dance components and guiding the students' dance training.

Together, the three of us worked to teach and rehearse *Dalia*, ensuring that all aspects of the project proceeded in an orderly manner. Fortunately, both Jason and Evie have

collaborated with me in the past on theatre or musical productions, allowing us to quickly reach consensus during rehearsals and establish a strong rapport. Our collaboration enabled students to engage in comprehensive learning across music, drama, and dance practices. This cooperative model not only enhanced the quality of the project but also fostered a closer team relationship throughout the process.

Jason not only collaborated behind the scenes but she also played a key role in the entire production. Unlike open auditions for professional or community musical theatre that are aimed at the public, my collaboration with the school's extracurricular music activities classes allowed me to discuss my plans with the music teachers before the auditions. I outlined my concept for the scene and the characteristics of the roles that would be needed. For example, since all participants were required to learn the singing-and-dancing theme, Jason and Carmon had already been informed that the project requires dancing and had been asked whether they could invite students who are willing to participate in physical activities. It was a great foundation for my later rehearsals. This pre-communication laid a very important foundation for my later rehearsals.

Since I had limited background in dance, a dance teacher was very important to the success of the project. The original production featured choreography that was quite complex, as the children were excellent dancers with years of experience in street dance. In this school production, however, most of the middle school students had no dance experience. Middle school students often feel awkward and highly self-conscious about their physical appearance, which can make the idea of dancing unappealing, especially for boys (Bobetsky, 2009; O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024; Ogden, 2008). As an educator, a main objective should be to design movement patterns that allow students to feel confident and appear polished on stage. It is necessary to focus on understanding what students are capable of and what they feel at ease performing. When students see that a teacher's aim is to help them shine on stage,

the teacher begins to build their trust and boost their confidence (Bobetsky, 2009). So my first step was to reach a consensus with Evie, the dance teacher, on simplifying the movements and reducing the difficulty of the dance. We put considerable thought into adjusting the difficulty level of the steps. While we wanted to maintain the original dance style, we also had to consider the students' abilities. Evie shared that,

> since most students are experiencing dance for the first time, the movements will be simplified to one action per beat, compared to the original version, which has many intricate movements. The choreography will primarily focus on large, expansive motions and symmetrical designs, moving from left to right. Some movements will even align with the lyrics, making it easier for students to grasp and remember.

Additionally, after each rehearsal, we recorded videos for the students to take home, allowing them to practice at home.

Musical theatre requires the teamwork of multiple educators rather than just one. In his book, *The magic of middle school musicals: Inspire your students to learn, grow, and succeed,* Bobetsky (2009) suggested that producers and teachers need to always seek advice from their colleagues to ensure that they reflect everyone's needs. This will avoid last minute crises and potential conflicts between teachers over rehearsal details. Therefore, it is especially necessary to develop a model of cooperation between classroom teachers and artists. By collaborating with professional artists, students not only gain rich knowledge and skills but also directly experience the real atmosphere and practice of the musical theatre industry.

From the perspective of teacher professional development, educators should cultivate a producer's sense , similar to that in musical theatre production. When the music teacher, Jason, reduced her involvement in rehearsals due to the students' strong musical foundation, she shifted to an administrative coordination role . Professional development programs

should train teachers to recognize situational needs and adjust their roles accordingly , ensuring that they can dynamically reposition themselves based on project demands . This flexibility optimizes the allocation of educational resources , enhancing both instructional effectiveness and overall project efficiency.

A Spiral Curriculum Approach to Learning

In school extracurricular activities, music, drama, and dance are typically scheduled separately. However, in the field of musical theatre, teachers often strive for the "triple threat" in professional musical theatre training, a term used to describe a person who excels in three distinct areas: acting, dancing, and singing (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Therefore, helping students develop their skills in music, drama, and dance holistically and integrating them is something teachers need to consider. Therefore, I adopted a spiral curriculum approach for the project, *Dalia*.

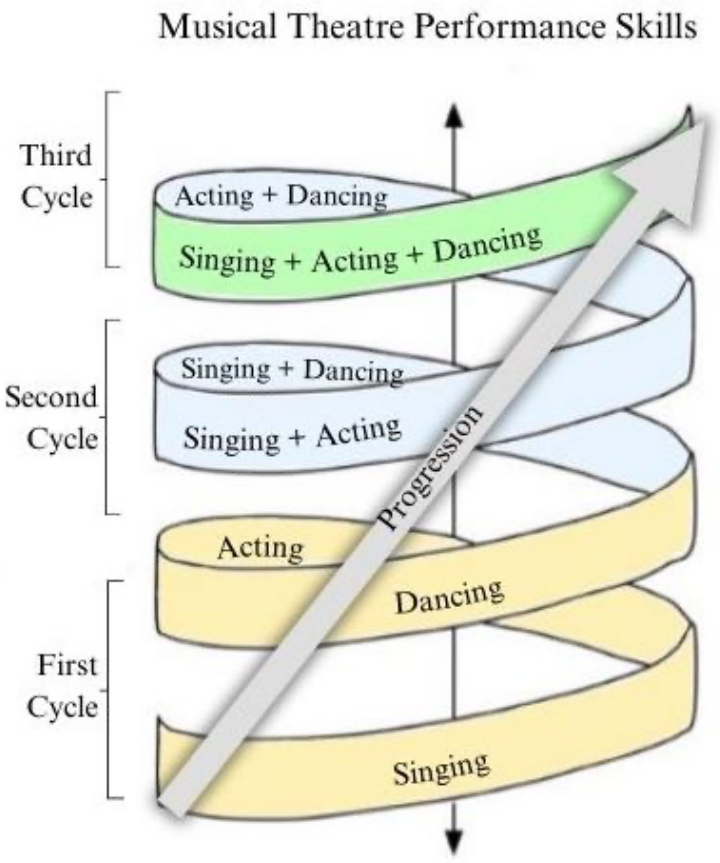
A spiral curriculum involves revisiting topics, subjects, or themes multiple times throughout a course. It’s not just about repeating what has been taught; each encounter should deepen understanding, with each iteration building on the last (Harden, 1999). Bruner (1975) shared at the Charles Gittins Memorial Lecture the concept of a spiral curriculum in early language learning. He explained that learning is not a linear accumulation of knowledge, but rather a process of achieving deep understanding through cyclical revisiting and reconstruction. After students achieved initial intuitive mastery, these concepts were revisited and systematically re-examined through more structured or applied approaches, ultimately integrating them with broader domains of knowledge. This training model, which progresses from simple to complex and emphasizes reinforcement leading to integration, is particularly suited for students learning new skills. Furthermore, I broke down the overall goals into smaller components of skills and content, and organized them in a logical sequence to promote learning and retention. Even in professional Broadway musicals, acting, music, and

movements are layered step by step and then combined into a complete work to be presented to the audience (Marshall, 2016).

The spiral model for musical theatre learning, adapted from Fautley's (2015) curriculum framework (see Figure 6.2), emphasizes cyclical and integrative learning at progressively deeper levels. Rather than striving for perfection in any single area, this approach focuses on steady improvement on each individual discipline, through practice and integration across multiple disciplines, to prepare for the integration of singing, dancing, and acting later in the learning process.

Figure 6.2

Spiral Curriculum Approach to Learning, adapted from Fautley (2015)



The first cycle (Figure 6.2, section in yellow) engaged students in individual skill development. We began with the most familiar part: singing. Among singing, acting, and

dancing, students were most familiar with singing, thanks to years of general music education and participation in the rich musical activities at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. Additionally, the songs in the production primarily featured popular music styles, which closely resemble the music students encounter in their daily lives. Therefore, we decided to begin with the singing parts, the activity that is most familiar to students.

After a brief introduction in the first rehearsal, we moved on to learning the theme song. Since students needed to sing while dancing in sync in the performance, we aimed for them to memorize the singing part as quickly as possible, allowing them to focus more on the dance practice afterward. After listening to the composer's demo, we assigned the vocal parts to the students: the boys were divided into two parts, while the girls had one part (which generally aligned with their usual choir or a cappella arrangements). We then began practicing the theme section with the sheet music. Given that the singing part was relatively simple compared to their previous works in choir and a cappella groups, students quickly memorized their parts under the accompaniment track.

The second area of learning in cycle one was acting. Students grow up observing actors on screen and stage, much like they listen to music. Although they did not actively participate, they have been exposed to acting and influenced by many experiences since childhood. Acting, in this sense, is both unfamiliar and familiar to them. While they may feel inexperienced in delivering lines or moving on stage, the dramatic elements of acting are deeply relatable when viewed through the lens of their everyday experiences. Moreover, throughout the rehearsal process, I continuously helped students analyze their characters' motivations and evolving journeys, deepening their understanding of their character and enabling them to interact with their partners more confidently. By placing the dramatic portion after singing, I acknowledged the students' mixed feelings of familiarity and

unfamiliarity with acting. As teachers, our role was to guide students in bringing these life experiences to the stage.

I placed dance, which is the least familiar skill set to most students, later in the learning process in cycle one, mainly because I hoped that by practicing singing and acting first, students could gradually overcome their fear of dance as an unfamiliar form of performance. The sequence also gave them time to enhance their self-expression ability and build up a certain degree of self-confidence. Thus, by the final dance session, they showed themselves bravely and enjoyed the fun of dancing. This step-by-step approach aims to create a relatively relaxed and accommodating learning environment for students, so that they felt more comfortable in trying out something new, like dance, and were more likely to engage in the performance.

From the second cycle (Figure 6.2, section in blue), the focus shifts from learning individual skills to integrating two artistic practices. I began merging singing with acting, interpreting certain lyrics as spoken lines with pitch and emphasizing the impact of songs on the overall story development, as well as the characters' motivations and emotional journeys within each piece. Furthermore, practicing lines alongside melody notes helps performers internalize both the musical and dramatic elements simultaneously, rather than treating them as separate tasks.

As stated earlier, the dance sessions were pushed back later than initially planned due to the impact of COVID-19. However, I transitioned into combining dancing with singing right after Evie's dance teaching class. While students found it challenging to coordinate both elements, incorporating lyrics into their movement practice helped reinforce choreography memorization. Students developed greater fluency in performing both disciplines together through repeated practice.

The third cycle (Figure 6.2, section in green) focused on integrating singing, acting, and dancing, a crucial competency in musical theatre. This process requires not only technical proficiency but also the ability to seamlessly transition between disciplines, ensuring that acting, singing, and dancing work in harmony. As the spiral continues to ascend, students revisit previously learned concepts while engaging with more advanced techniques. The integration of all three disciplines becomes more refined, demanding greater precision and deeper emotional engagement. As the spiral continues to ascend, students revisit previously learned concepts while engaging with more advanced techniques, and they begin to express themselves confidently on stage.

Figure 6.2 illustrates how students progressed from learning a single skill to continuously reviewing and strengthening their abilities, with each stage building upon the previous one. By practicing these three art forms using a spiral approach to learning, students not only continued to consolidate their foundations in each of the different areas but also appreciate the interconnections of the arts in musical theatre. For example, when studying theatre, students enhanced their musical expression through the understanding and performance of their roles, while in dance training, the rhythmic and emotional expression of music enriched their theatre performances. Through this cyclical learning process, they gradually developed into well-rounded musical theatre performers, ultimately reaching the performance skills they needed to perform on stage.

For educators, although rehearsal time for musical theatre is often limited and always feels insufficient, it is still essential to intentionally build in time for students to process new knowledge. Beyond just moving forward with staging and music, students need space for revisiting and reconstructing what they've learned—allowing for deeper understanding, integration of skills, and more meaningful artistic growth.

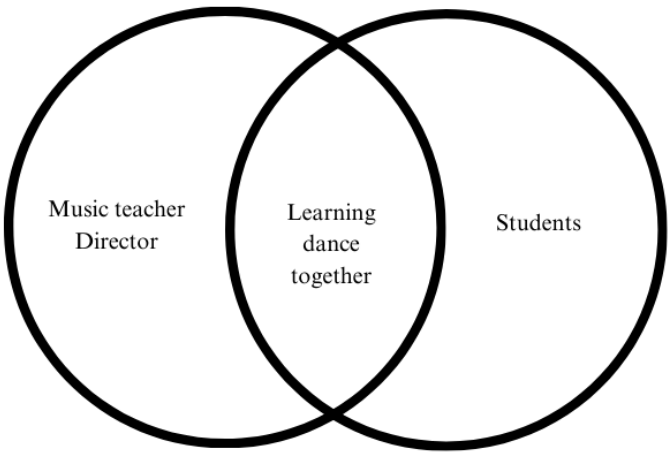
Cultivating a Learning Community

Co-experiencing musical theatre with students also provides a platform for teachers, as lifelong learners, to practice these skills alongside their students and discover something new together (Wadler, 2022). Neither Jason nor I are professional dance instructors, so we chose to learn alongside the students and actively engage in the teaching process. This not only enhanced the students' sense of involvement but also allowed them to feel the support and companionship of the teachers.

Specifically, when we began learning the theme dance with students, Jason and I stood at the front and back of the classroom, respectively. We didn't just stand aside supervising; instead, we actively moved among the students, learning together with them. This approach allowed the students to sense the teachers' dedication to learning dance. When they saw us, as teachers, putting in the same effort to try something new, it inspired their motivation to learn and gave them the confidence to try and challenge themselves. Moreover, it allowed the teachers to maintain the same learning rhythm as the students, which helped us understand the difficulties they were facing. This way, when it came time for full rehearsals, we could address those challenges. Additionally, in cases when the dance teacher was unavailable, we guided the students through their dance movements.

Figure 6.3

Teachers and Students as Learners



This collaboration was not limited to physical coordination but also extended to emotional exchange and support. When students encountered difficulties, we approached the challenge from their perspective, offering timely encouragement and feedback to help them overcome setbacks in their learning process. This not only sparked their interest in dance but also helped them realize that learning is not a one-sided effort but a journey of mutual progress between teachers and students.

Moreover, actively engaging in the dance learning process alongside our students significantly strengthened the bond between them and us as their teachers. By stepping into the role of learners, we broke down traditional barriers, fostering a more approachable and relatable dynamic. This shared experience cultivated a sense of camaraderie, demonstrating that we were not just instructors. As students witnessed us facing challenges together with them, their trust in us deepened, and their respect grew, reinforcing a relationship built on mutual effort and shared growth. Tony Award-winning lyricist Lynne Ahrens emphasizes that actors should strive to be "good community members," treating their fellow performers with respect and kindness both on and off the stage (O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024). This concept applies not only to professional theatre but also to school musical rehearsals. When students see their teachers facing challenges and overcoming difficulties alongside them, they are more likely to inspire one another, fostering a supportive learning environment.

For educators, professional growth requires the ability to confront personal limitations whilewhile maintaining a passion to learn. Embracing a learner's mindset when encountering unfamiliar areas is essential, allowing teachers to adapt fluidly between the roles of instructor and learner. Acknowledging knowledge gaps not as weaknesses but as opportunities for shared growth fosters a more open and collaborative learning environment fosters a more open and collaborative learning environment. By engaging in synchronous teacher-student learning , educators can transform challenges into moments of collective progress, breaking

down hierarchical barriers in the classroom and strengthening emotional connections with students.

Flexibility

Every school is unique, just like the individuals who walk its hallways. Another key element for successful co-creation of a musical is flexibility—an open mindset (Wadler, 2022). Although I outlined the general rehearsal content for each section in the project proposal, I did not yet have sufficient understanding of the students' performance skills to accurately predict rehearsal outcomes. Therefore, during the rehearsal process, I needed to constantly remind team members of the importance of flexibility and to adjust according to the needs of the teaching-learning context.

The artist collaboration model itself emphasizes flexibility. Whether as a dance teacher, music instructor, or drama coach, each of us brings our own artistic expertise to the table. When we come together with different specialties to work toward a common goal—putting on a successful musical theatre performance—every department must accommodate one another. For instance, although singing plays a larger role than dancing in the excerpt chosen from *Dalia*, the students' lack of dance foundation meant that I need to allocate more time to the dance instructor to achieve a better overall presentation. If I had focused solely on refining the students' singing techniques and spent excessive time perfecting their vocals, the result might have an impressive auditory experience. However, the students could end up lacking confidence in their physical expressions on stage, which would go against the ultimate goal of a musical theatre performance: seamlessly integrating singing, dancing, and acting to create a true "triple threat." Flexibility in our teamwork enabled us to adapt to each other's methods, respect one another's expertise, and seamlessly integrate our contributions.

Additionally, since we were employing a spiral approach to teaching and learning, during rehearsals, it was necessary to remind the team of the importance of flexibility and

adjust based on the needs of the teaching context (Stokes, 2010). As teachers, we needed to discuss and make adjustments according to the students' progress in singing, drama, and dance from one rehearsal to the next. Flexibility was crucial in that context. For instance, in the separate movement sections for male and female students, we aimed to group them for more detailed work on specific roles, which required some last-minute adjustments.

Given the size of the musical theatre team and the collaborative nature among teachers, it was necessary to adapt to various unforeseen circumstances. In a collaborative rehearsal setting, unforeseen circumstances—such as changes in personnel, venue availability, or technical challenges—can arise. Flexibility enables the team members to respond effectively to these disruptions. For example, during the first week of rehearsals, when our dance teacher contracted COVID, it was entirely unexpected. After assessing the teacher's situation and the specific regulations of the school, we decided to extend the entire schedule by one week. This allowed the teacher ample time to recover and ensured that students had a sufficient learning period to study and adapt.

Moreover, it is essential to maintain a certain degree of flexibility during the rehearsal process with students. If a student improvises a scene that proves to be effective, teachers should encourage them to continue developing it. This approach serves as an excellent way to foster student engagement (Bobetsky, 2009). When students exercise their creativity, teachers should respond constructively and affirm their thought processes and creative efforts. Within the framework of aligning with the intention of original script writer of *Dalia*, their ideas should be adopted whenever feasible, integrating them flexibly into the production. Such practices not only contribute to the diversity and richness of the work but also enhance students' understanding of the multifaceted meanings within artistic creation, thereby deepening their comprehension of the script of *Dalia* and its relationship with their own interpretations.

Since parents play a vital role in supporting the production process, effective communication with them requires flexibility (Click, 2024). The musical *Dalia* was developed for the students in the school's extracurricular music activities. The goal was to complete rehearsals and performances without requiring additional school hours. However, due to the intensive short-term rehearsal schedule, some students needed to return to school on weekends which inevitably impacted their time management. One parent called the school immediately after receiving the notice expressing concerns about their child's academic performance and worrying that additional weekend activities might affect preparations for next year's exams. Upon understanding the parent's concerns, I quickly communicated with the student to learn their perspective. The student expressed worries about falling behind in rehearsals if unable to attend fully, while also wishing to dedicate more time to academics. Respecting their choice, I adjusted the plan to accommodate individual needs. Therefore, in team management, it is crucial to remain flexible and understand each member's needs and circumstances. Striking a balance among various demands ensures the project progresses smoothly while addressing the priorities of students and parents.

For music educators, the ability to flexibly adjust the teaching framework is essential, allowing them to allocate time based on students' actual performance. Additionally, they must effectively coordinate interdisciplinary resources and make real-time adjustments—for example, when a dance instructor was absent due to COVID-related disruptions. This level of flexibility requires teachers to assess and adapt educational resources using professional judgment. Like a musical theater director, educators must navigate a balance between artistic integrity and the available resources.

Summary

Musical theatre projects demand communication and collaboration among school administrators, teachers, students, and artists. The artist-centered collaboration model in this

project positioned professional artists as instructors, Evie and me, supported by full-time music teachers from the school, Jason and Carmon. This structure leverages the expertise of artists while fostering teamwork among educators and allowing educators to concentrate on their strengths while addressing student needs effectively (Leung, 2018). The spiral curriculum ensures the integration of dance, drama, and music in a cohesive manner, emphasizing skill-building and integration. This method enhances students' confidence, retention, and skill mastery through repeated reinforcement.

Teachers actively participate alongside students during rehearsals, fostering teacher-student synchronization that strengthens bonds, inspires motivation, and creates a supportive learning environment. Flexibility is a cornerstone of the collaborative model, addressing unforeseen challenges like schedule adjustments, personnel changes, and student improvisations. By maintaining a flexible and inclusive approach, educators empower students to explore their creativity through improvisation in the rehearsals and deepen their understanding of artistic creation, ultimately enhancing their overall learning experience in musical theatre.

The experience of students successfully completing a musical is not only positive and creative but also empowering. It fosters a sense of accomplishment that passive appreciation of a musical theatre show cannot provide (Marshall, 2016). As an educator, it is a great honor if we can create unforgettable musical theatre memories for students.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The primary goal of this study was to explore the impact of musical theatre education on students' artistic, social, and personal development, and to assess the use of a collaborative and interdisciplinary curriculum model to implement the project.The purpose was to document the implementation of a musical theatre project based on the musical, *Dalia*, in a middle school in Macau, China. An excerpt from the Cantonese musical theatre show, *Dalia*, was chosen as the material for the production.

This teacher research study documented the planning, implementation, and outcomes of the collaborative musical theatre project *Dalia* at Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau. As a researcher, leading teaching planner, co-producer, and teacher, I collected data including interviews, questionnaires, and rehearsal and performance recordings. I also documented my reflections in a journal.

Key Findings and Their Implications

This study was centered around two key questions. The first question—what knowledge, skills, and personal growth did students gain from their participation in the Dalia project—focused on students' perspective outcomes, specifically the musical knowledge, performance skills, and personal growth they developed. The second question—what the key elements of the collaborative curriculum model were used to implement the project at the Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School in Macau—examined the implementation process from the teachers' perspectives, emphasizing the collaborative model and its key elements.

The relationship between these two questions lies in the connection between process and outcome. The collaborative curriculum model served as the foundation, shaping the learning environment and the instructional strategies that teachers used to guide student experiences. This process directly influenced the musical theatre knowledge, performance

skills, and personal growth students acquired through their participation in *Dalia* project. By analyzing what students gained, educators can assess the effectiveness of the curriculum model. Examining both questions together enabled me to better understand how specific teaching strategies and collaborative elements contributed to the educational outcomes, and to identify areas for improvement. Ultimately, this reflective cycle—setting up the collaborative curriculum model, facilitating student learning, and reflecting on the outcomes—creates a framework for my study. Here are the findings related to the two research questions.

Students' Performance Skills Development and Personal Growth

Students demonstrated improved musical, acting, and dance abilities, along with enhanced confidence and stage presence. Based on interviews, questionnaires, and reflection journals, findings indicate that students developed understanding and skills throughout the program and showcased significant progress in various performance aspects. According to the questionnaire data, dancing skills saw the highest level of improvement, with 75% of students learning to dance for the first time. Through consistent practice, they overcame challenges and embraced the experience with enthusiasm. One student reflected, "I felt like a K-pop idol learning hip-hop – it was fresh and exciting!" Acting skills followed closely, with 70% of students reporting that they felt empowerment stepping out of their comfort zones to immerse themselves in bold character portrayals. The head of the music department, Carmon, was impressed by the students' expressive stage performances, which exceeded her expectations.

Growth in speech skills was another key focus, with 60% of students thinking they improved their articulation, emotional expression, and dialogue delivery. Rehearsals emphasized proper lip, teeth, and tongue positioning to enhance clarity, which is expected to benefit students beyond theatre. In vocal skills, 50% of students reported that they adapted from choir and art song backgrounds to the pop-style singing required for musical theatre.

Compared with singing in their choir or acappella groups, students were trained to focus on emotional clarity and delivery, helping to advance the storyline effectively. These findings are also consistent with Feay-Shaw's (2001) ethnographic study that found that students' auditory awareness, vocal skills, music reading skills, and dramatic skills became stronger after participating in musical theatre.

Participation in the musical fostered teamwork, communication skills, and self-expression, skills that are associated with students' emotional and social development. The project contributed to students' personal growth, particularly in motivation and confidence, with 70% of students reporting on the questionnaire that they gained self-assurance on stage. Many expressed excitement about participating in future musical projects, showing their motivation to perform on stage. According to students and their teachers, students' teamwork skills also improved notably, with 65% of students reporting that they learned to support their peers and collaborate effectively. Teachers observed a natural progression in teamwork throughout rehearsals, as students became more attuned to working together. Additionally, self-expression flourished, with 50% of students describing how their experiences led them to explore new aspects of themselves and express emotions boldly and creatively. This finding aligns with findings in John's (2014) study in which students were reported to have gained unity through rehearsal practice, felt a sense of community belonging, and fostered individual and collective identity.

Moreover, the program formed a strong sense of belonging and closer relationships, with 40% of students stating that they felt a strengthened group identity, shared memories and a supportive environment that helped them feel valued within the team. Similarly, teacher-led rehearsals played a key role in improving collaboration and attendance, ultimately helping students build stronger bonds with both their peers and instructors. This is related to

Click (2024) who reported that in addition to performance skills, students greatly benefit from the sense of community and friendship built during the rehearsal process.

A Collaborative Model for Musical Theatre Education

Based on practical experience and my interactions with various individuals in the project, I identified several key elements that could be applied across different contexts of educational theatre: communication, artist-centered cooperation, and a spiral curriculum approach to learning, cultivating a learning community, and flexibility. These elements provide educators with valuable insights and clear guidance for promoting musical theatre education in schools.

Establish smooth communication channels among teachers, students, parents, and administrators to maintain alignment. Musical theatre is a highly collaborative art form that integrates acting, music, dance, and technology, making it more complex than standard extracurricular activities. In this project, I served as the central coordinator, facilitating communication among school administrators, choreographers, music teachers, technical teams, production companies, parents, and students. Figure 6.1 (see Chapter 6) highlights my role as the communication hub, ensuring smooth information flow across departments. The core connections between the music teacher, drama teacher, choreographer, and students significantly influenced student engagement and performance. Meanwhile, parents and administrators maintained open communication to keep families informed and address concerns, allowing students to focus on their rehearsal.

The collaborative model used in *Dalia* was an artist-centered model. As an external teaching artist, I took the lead in instruction; choreographer Evie led the dance rehearsals; music teacher Jason acted as an assistant in rehearsals and worked on administrative and communication tasks that occurred outside rehearsal time. Since the students had a strong musical background, rehearsal time focused more on acting and dance than on singing. This

reduced the need for Jason's involvement in music instruction and allowed for a more performance-driven rehearsal process that catered to the students' strengths and needs.

A spiral curriculum approach to learning gradually guides students from familiar elements, systematically building their skills and confidence. The *Dalia* musical project employed a spiral curriculum approach, where students revisited key performance elements—music, drama, and dance—at progressively deeper levels. Rather than treating these disciplines as separate entities, this approach integrated them in a step-by-step manner, reinforcing learning through repeated exposure and gradual skill-building (Harden, 1999). The process began with music, the most familiar aspect for students due to their choral and acappella music background. Once students mastered the songs, they moved on to acting, which, while somewhat unfamiliar, drew from their everyday experiences. The final stage was dance, which was introduced last to help students build confidence before tackling a less familiar skill. This structured approach helped students overcome initial hesitation and allowed them to engage more comfortably with musical theatre.

By continuously cycling through music, drama, and dance, students strengthened their abilities in each area while also understanding how these elements interconnect in performance. Each rehearsal revisited previous lessons while integrating new challenges, reinforcing learning and boosting confidence. Over time, students became more adept at blending acting, singing, and movement into a cohesive performance.

Cultivating a learning community in musical theatre involves teachers and students actively engaging in the learning process together, fostering a sense of shared growth and support. By participating alongside students, teachers demonstrate that learning is a lifelong journey, inspiring motivation and confidence. In dance rehearsals, for example, teachers did not merely supervise but learned alongside students, breaking down traditional barriers and strengthening their bond. This collaborative approach allowed teachers to

understand students' challenges, provide timely encouragement, and create a supportive environment where learning was a mutual effort. Such experiences reinforce respect and a shared commitment to progress, aligning with the idea that both educators and students should contribute to a positive and respectful community.

Flexibility is essential in a musical production, allowing for adjustments in resources, schedules, and teaching approaches to ensure smooth progress. Teachers must balance artistic disciplines, allocating time, based on students' needs, to achieve a well-rounded performance. Being open and flexible toward students' improvisation helps enhance engagement (Bobetsky, 2009). Furthermore, effective communication with parents also requires flexibility to help address concerns and accommodate individual schedules. By remaining flexible, the team can effectively collaborate, integrate diverse expertise, and create an inclusive, supportive learning environment that enhances both artistic expression and student development.

Recommendations

Research on musical theatre pedagogy remains an evolving field worldwide (O'Bryan & Harrison, 2024; Pickering & Henson, 2021). Studies specifically focused on K-12 musical theatre education are even more limited due to its young history, guarded industry knowledge, academic neglect, and the field's emphasis on experiential learning over formal research (Marshall, 2019). To build on this study, further research is recommended in these areas:"

- Music teacher training and professional development in musical theatre education. Sanderson (2015) recommended that music teachers interested in musical theatre should accumulate knowledge in five areas including basic knowledge of musical theatre, conducting and vocal pedagogy, musical theatre production, and leadership. Specific recommendations for the development of teacher knowledge and skills are found in chapter

6. If the impact of such training programs can be further enhanced in the future, collaborations with musical theatre faculty at universities, performing arts centers, or professional musical theatre organizations could be established to develop joint initiatives in areas such as curriculum design, mentorship programs, and research-driven professional development. These partnerships would ensure that educators receive comprehensive, research-supported training, enabling them to provide students with high-quality musical theatre experience.

- Effective pedagogical strategies for K-12 musical theatre education, investigating best practices strategies and sequences in vocal training, acting instruction, choreography, and stage direction tailored for young learners.

A core question is how the sequence of instruction can be adapted to the developmental stages of learners in elementary, middle, and high school to ensure that learners at each stage have an engaging, skill-appropriate learning experience.

- The impact of participation in musical theatre on student personal development.

The present study has shown that participation can have a positive impact on students' personal growth. However, further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which musical theatre influences students' cognitive, social, and emotional development, including confidence building, teamwork, and creative expression, as well as how these effects can be explained and guided using theorists from music psychology. Researchers can carry out experimental and descriptive quantitative studies to analyze changes in students' cognitive, social, and emotional development using data from before and after participation in musical theatre performances.

- Interdisciplinary approaches to musical theatre education in the K-12 music curriculum.

The study of musical theatre education can be carried out by integrating it with other subjects such as literature, history, visual arts, foreign language learning, design, and business, among

others to provide students with a more comprehensive learning experience. Futhermore, intersections with the history curriculum can also be explored to examine the historical context of musicals from different periods and to analyze how they reflect social change. There is a need to compose new musicals rooted in Cantonese history and culture, which can be incorporated into school curricula to promote cultural relevance and student engagement. Additionally, collaboration with literature classes can help students engage in text and lyric analysis, enhancing their reading comprehension skills. Students in non-English-speaking regions can also use musical theatre as a tool to learn English.

Personal Implications of Study

We live in an era of rapid technological updates and fast-paced AI development. Although machines can generate relevant content and products in a short time based on human instructions, they can't fully replace empathy in social interactions (Rubin et al., 2024). Participation in musical theatre, as evidenced in the culturally relevant Dalia project, can foster students' relationships with peers and enhance their self-confidence. It can also build a sense of community and develop a teamwork spirit rooted in direct human interaction and collaboration. The emotions generated by these real human interactions are something that technology cannot provide.

This study was intended to serve as a reference document to guide teachers in promoting musical theatre education in more schools. Although the *Dalia* project was a small-scale experiment, I hope that the experience and study will help more music teachers in Cantonese-speaking districts to engage in musical theatre with their students.

In the future, I am interested in conducting more in-depth research on musical theatre education, including the exploration of different collaborative models in various educational settings. Musical theatre in schools varies by context due to differences in resources, administration, funding, and participant backgrounds (Rajan, 2019). After the *Dalia* musical

theatre project concluded, I was fortunate to direct *Annie Kids* at an elementary school in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the winter of 2025. Although both projects were implemented in an educational setting, the collaboration model for *Annie Kids* was fundamentally different from the *Dalia* project. The initiative was parent-led, with the school providing support and inviting external instructors. Parent volunteers were responsible for administration work, coordination, and set and costume design. Due to limited funding, a secondary school student was brought in as a choreographer, and I director. This experience led me to further reflect on the countless possibilities of collaborative models in musical theatre within an educational setting. As a result, I am interested in conducting further research on different educational collaboration models in musical theatre.

School musical theatre serves as an interdisciplinary art form that integrates resources from various academic fields within a school setting. This collaborative teaching model, involving school music teachers, extracurricular activity instructors, and external professionals, raises the question of whether it has the potential for broader implementation across more schools, whether in general music classrooms or as an extracurricular activity. The question of how school administrators can approach this type of resource integration is also of interest to me as I explore models in the future.

Educators require specialized training in musical theatre pedagogy to effectively guide students. For example, at its annual National Educator Conference the Met Opera gathers educators and school leaders from across the US for an immersive professional development experience. Through workshops, keynote sessions, and discussions with opera stars and Met creative team members, the Conference equips teachers with strategies to integrate opera into their classrooms effectively (Metropolitan Opera, n.d.). In China, if collaboration with the Bureau of Education or a local performing arts centre is possible, the practice of inviting professional instructors to provide workshops, keynote sessions, and

discussions in vocal instruction, choreography, and stage direction for music teachers would ensure teachers have the necessary skills to support students' artistic development. By equipping educators with a strong foundation in musical theatre, schools can foster a more engaging and enriching learning environment for students.

References

Acton, L. (2020). Children's musicals for educational and community settings. In D. Ruwe & J. Leve (Eds.), *Children, childhood, and musical theater* (pp. 188–209*).* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315571539

American Association of Community Theatre. (n.d.). Job descriptions. http://aact.org/theatre-people

Bailey, B., Zyga, O., Meeker, H., Kirk, J., & Russ, S. W. (2021). A comparison of curricula: Examining the efficacy of a school-based musical theater intervention. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities, 25*(3), 370–386. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629519883159

Barrett, J. R. (2023). *Seeking connections: An interdisciplinary perspective on music teaching and learning.* Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oso/9780197511275.001.0001

Berklee College of Music. (n.d.). Teaching artist. *Berklee College of Music*. https://www.berklee.edu/careers/roles/teaching-artist

Bickford, T. (2012). The new "tween" music industry: The Disney Channel, Kidz Bop, and an emerging childhood counterpublic. *Popular Music, 31*(3), 417–436. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23325786

Bobetsky, V. V. (2009). *The magic of middle school musicals: Inspire your students to learn, grow, and succeed.* Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Burnau, J. M. (1966). *Factors concerning the production of the musical in the high school* (Publication No. 6615060). [Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri - Kansas City]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/factors-concerning-production-musical-high-school/docview/302221625/se-2

Bruner, J. S. (1975). *Entry into early language: A spiral curriculum* [Charles Gittins Memorial Lecture]. University College of Swansea.

Calvert, S. L., & Tart, M. (1993). Song versus verbal forms for very-long-term, long-term, and short-term verbatim recall. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 14*(2), 245–260. https://doi.org/10.1016/0193-3973(93)90035-T

Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). *Triple threat*. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved April 3, 2025, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/triple-threat

Cartography and Cadastre Bureau, (n.d.). *Geographical Location* https://www.dscc.gov.mo/en/geographical_location.html#scroll

Casado, D. (2017). *Teaching musical theatre: The essential handbook: 16 ready-to-go lesson plans to build a better actor*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Cerniglia, K. J. (2022). We're all in this together. In L. MacDonald & R. Donovan (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to musical theatre* (pp. 450–464). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429260247

Chan, K. C. (2015). *Hong Kong children's musical theatre: How is it Hong Kong?* [Master's thesis, University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam]. HKU Scholars Hub. http://hdl.handle.net/10722/223434

Chen-Hafteck, L. (1997) Music and language development in early childhood: Integrating past research in the two domains. *Early child development and care, 130*(1), 85-97. DOI: 10.1080/0300443971300109

Click, J. (2024). *Building a musical theatre program for kids: The essential handbook*. Beat by Beat.

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau. (2019). *Joint declaration of the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the government of the People's Republic of China on the question of Hong Kong.* Retrieved from https://www.cmab.gov.hk/gb/issues/jd2.htm

Cultural Affairs Bureau. (2023). *Broadway musical The Sound of Music offers 16 successful performances, with the ticketing rate reaching 92%, effectively promoting cultural tourism.* https://www.icm.gov.mo/en/News/detail/21556

Dai, B. (2011). School music education and music teacher education in Macao [澳门的普通学校音乐教育与音乐教师教育]. *Xinghai yin yue xue yuan xue bao [Xinghai Music Conservatory Journal]*, 3, 151-156. School of Arts of Macao Polytechnic Institute, Macao. ISSN: 1008-7389. DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1008-7389.2011.03.023

Dalia Program. (2023). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1siqFq-P3OZBvWvh0IZU-W-SyD_8yqmEj/view

Davey, D. J. (2010). *Musical theatre in secondary education: Teacher preparation, responsibilities, and attitudes* (Publication No. 820544470*)*. [Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/musical-theatre-secondary-education-teacher/docview/820544470/se-2

Davids, J., & LaTour, S. (2020). *Vocal technique: A guide to classical and contemporary styles for conductors, teachers, and singers* (2nd ed.). Waveland Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781478645153

Ding, Y. (2020). 音乐剧在中学音乐教学中的应用研究 [A study on the application of musical theater in secondary school music teaching]. *中外交流 [Zhong Wai Jiao Liu]*. 27(28), 325

Education and Youth Development Bureau. (n.d.). *The Requirements of basic academic attainments [基本學力要求]*. Retrieved from https://portal.dsedj.gov.mo/webdsejspace/site/ddca/index.jsp?con=requirements&langsel=C

Embassy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hong Kong. (2021). *The content of the basic policy of "peaceful reunification, one country, two systems". “和平统一，一国两制”基本方针的内容*. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20210530120626/http://www.fmcoprc.gov.hk/chn/topic/dtzc/yglz/t45129.htm

Fan, Z. Y. (2015). 中学音乐课堂音乐剧教学策略构建和实践探究 [Exploring the construction and practice of musical theater teaching strategies in secondary school music classrooms]. *新教育时代电子杂志（教师版）[New Education Age E-Magazine (Teacher's Edition)]*. (32). 236.

Fautley, M. (2015, May 16). On linear progress and spiral curricula. *DrFautley's Blog*. https://drfautley.wordpress.com/2015/05/16/on-linear-progress-and-spiral-curricula/

Farber, D. C. (2004). *Producing theatre: A comprehensive legal and business guide* (3rd rev. ed.). Limelight Editions.

Feay-Shaw, S. (2001). The view through the lunchroom window: An ethnography of a fifth-grade musical. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 150,* 37–51.

Gelles, B. (2023). “To being an us for once, instead of a them”: Musical theatre aesthetics and youth-oriented musicals. In M. J. Lodge (Ed.), *Milestones in musical theatre* (1st ed., pp. 83-100). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003256458

Guo, Y. (2011). *小学课外音乐社团活动的调查研究 [An investigation into extracurricular music club activities in primary schools]* [Master's thesis, Central Conservatory of Music]. https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD2012&filename=1012277669.nh

Harden, R. M. (1999). What is a spiral curriculum? *Medical Teacher, 21*(2), 141–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/01421599979752

Henderson, B., Meier, D. R., & Perry, G. (2012). *What is teacher research?* National Association for the Education of Young Children. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/pubs/Nature%20of%20Teacher%20Research.pdf

Houten,V., & Zacchilli, K.E. (1999). *High school musical theatre and the meaning students give to their involvement* (Publication No. 9935665). [Doctoral dissertation, New York University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/high-school-musical-theatre-meaning-students-give/docview/304515219/se-2

Hu, J. (2019). Titled "Musical Drama": The early development of Cantonese musicals in Hong Kong. *Theatre Arts Monthly*, *000(006),* 4-7. https://m.fx361.com/news/2019/1227/11015237.html

Huang, Q. (2023, December 30). All you need to know about the hit musical *The impossible trial,* [关于爆款音乐剧《大状王》，你想知道的都在这里了]. Wen hui bao. Retrieved from https://www.whb.cn/commonDetail/913136

Israel, D. (2009). *Staying school in arts education and New York city high school graduation rates* [Report]. The Center for Arts Education. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c8fb69016b6406745780b5e/t/5d1b9c259a783f0001f50c7b/1562090534594/cae_arts_and_graduation_report.pdf

John, R. (2014). Part of it all: The high school musical as a community of practice. *Visions of Research in Music Education, 24* (2014): 1– 29, http:// www.rider.edu/ ~vrme.

Kindelan, N. (2022). *STEM, theatre arts, and interdisciplinary integrative learning: Bridging the cultures.* Cham: Springer International Publishing AG.

Lai, J. Y. (2013). 中学音乐课堂音乐剧教学策略研究 [A study of musical theater teaching strategies in secondary school music classrooms.]. *中国音乐教育[China Music Education]*, *1*, 32-34.

Legg, R., & Green, A. (2015). Music theatre: At the crest of music education's third wave. *Curriculum Journal*, 26(4), 518–533. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2015.1060893

Leung, B. W. (2014). Teachers' transformation as learning: Teaching Cantonese opera in Hong Kong schools with a teacher–artist partnership. *International Journal of Music Education, 32*(1), 119-131.

Leung, B.W. (2018). *Teaching Cantonese opera in Hong Kong schools: Interaction and collaboration between music teachers and artists*. Routledge.

Leung, B.W. (2024). Transmission of Cantonese opera in school music education: A survey of Hong Kong and Guangdong music teachers for policy review. *Arts Education Policy Review*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2021.1992325

Lewis, M. P. (Ed.) (2009*) Ethnologue: Languages of the world*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: http://www.ethnologue.com/.

Li, Q. (2018). 试论地方高校中国传统音乐理论课程建设之意义 [Significance of traditional music theory curricula construction in local colleges]. *China Music Education*, *7*, 28–32.

Liu, D. (2013). 中国原创音乐剧的成功范例——《雪狼湖》 [Successful examples of original Chinese musicals— "Snow Wolf Lake"]. *音乐生活, 1,* 78–80.

Liu, J. Z. (2016). *Cantopop in Hong Kong: Three different periods of development and three different styles [香港的粤语流行曲--三个时期、三种不同风格].*

https://www.hkihss.hku.hk/events/ccliu/paper.pdf

Lo, Z. (2023). Is Hong Kong becoming the 'Broadway of the east'? *Tatler Asia.* https://www.tatlerasia.com/lifestyle/arts/hong-kong-cantonese-musical-art

Lynch, T. (n.d.). *From the top history of community theatre in America.* American Association of Community Theatre. https://aact.org/community-theatre-history

MacDonald, L. (2020). Seasons of love. *Performance Research*, *25*(1), 112-120. 10.1080/13528165.2020.1747260

Macao Education and Youth Affairs Bureau. (2017) *初中音樂課程指引 [The requirements of basic academic attainments for junior secondary school education].* https://www.dsedj.gov.mo/crdc/guide/data/junior/Music_guide_c.pdf. (pp. 10-11)

Macao Education and Youth Development Bureau. (2023). *Number of schools by school type and education level.* https://portal.dsedj.gov.mo/webdsejspace/internet/Inter_main_page.jsp?id=8525&

Macao News. (2023). *Is it Macau or Macao?* Retrieved from https://macaonews.org/life/is-it-macau-or-macao/

Macao Polytechnic University. (n.d.). *Bachelor of Arts in Music.* Music/https://www.mpu.edu.mo/esa/en/bachelor_am.php

Marshall, H.D. (2016). *Strategies for success in musical theatre: A guide for music directors in school, college, and community theatre*. Oxford University Press.

Marshall, H. (2019). Preparing music educators for coaching and conducting musical theatre. In C. M. Conway (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of preservice music teacher education in the United States*, (pp.748-764). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190671402.013.36.

Matthews, S., & Yip, V. (2010). *Cantonese: A comprehensive grammar* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203835012

Metropolitan Opera. (n.d.). Professional development. The Metropolitan Opera. https://www.metopera.org/discover/education/hdschools/professional-development/

Michigan Performance Outreach Workshop (MPOW) (n.d.). Student Arts Navigator, https://artsatmichigan.umich.edu/studentorgs/directory/view.php?id=185

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2022). *音樂課程標準大綱 [Music program standards].* http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A17/moe_794/moe_624/200107/W020201201547559893109.doc

Morgan, M. (2018). On with the show! Tips for producing a successful musical. *Canadian Music Educator*, *59*(3), 36+. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A573714084/AONE?u=umuser&sid=googleScholar&xid=0333c135

Music Theatre International. (n.d.). *Broadway junior.* https://www.mtishows.com/broadway-junior

Musical Trio. (n.d.).校園音樂劇淺談 [School musical discussion]. Retrieved from https://www.musicaltrio.hk/schoolmusical?fbclid=IwAR0y1k2meTMO5YxtgJ68hfGkNp3ZQEo92pS5eEer18XhhXxjnSCiEaKrIkE

Ogden, H. C. (2008). *Vivid moments long remembered: The lifetime impact of elementary school musical theatre.* (Publication No. 304402003). [Master thesis, Queen's University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/vivid-moments-long-remembered-lifetime-impact/docview/304402003/se-2

Phillips, K. H. (2004). *Directing the choral music program.* Oxford University Press.

Pickering, K., & Henson, D. (2021). *A teachers guide to musical theatre.* Methuen Drama.

Pitts, S. E. (2007). Anything goes: A case study of extra-curricular musical participation in an English secondary school, *Music Education Research*, *9*(1), 145-165, DOI: 10.1080/14613800601127627

Playbill (2018). *How Disney shows are changing the landscape of the American musical theatre.* https://playbill.com/article/how-disney-shows-are-changing-the-landscape-of-the-american-musical-theatre

Rajan. R. S. (2016). *From backpacks to Broadway: Children's experiences in musical theatre*.

Rajan R. S. (2019). *Musical theater in schools: Purpose, process, performance*. Oxford University Press.

Roberts, K. J. (2007). *Participation in musical theater as a vehicle for understanding of interdisciplinary work in the arts, improvement of self-concept, and music achievement among fifth-grade students* (Publication No. 304821623). [Doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/participation-musical-theater-as-vehicle/docview/304821623/se-2?accountid=14667

Rubin, M., Li, J. Z., Zimmerman, F., Ong, D. C., Goldenberg, A., & Perry, A. (2024). The value of perceiving a human response: Comparing perceived human versus AI-generated empathy. *OSF Preprints*. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ng97s

Romano, A. (2019). *High school musical — and its ongoing cultural legacy — explained.* Vox. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/11/13/20958457/high-school-musical-movies-legacy-dcom-bet-on-it

Sadie, S., & Tyrrell, J. (2001). *The new Grove dictionary of music and musicians*. Grove's Dictionaries. (2nd. ed., pp 453.)

Sample, A. D. (1964). *A study of the suitability of selected musicals for performance by high school students.* (Publication No. 6504767). [Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/study-suitability-selected-musicals-performance/docview/302165851/se-2

Sammas, C. (n.d.). *香港音樂劇的歷史 [The history of Hong Kong musicals].* Retrieved from https://www.geocities.ws/mymusicalsworld/creations/hkmusical/history.htm

Sanderson, S. M. (2015). *Choral music educators and high school musical theater programs: A collective case study* (Order No. 10102529). [Doctoral dissertation, University of Florida] ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/choral-music-educators-high-school-musical/docview/1786295153/se-2

Stokes, W. W. C. (2010). *The experience of students as part of a secondary school musical theatre course* (Order No. MR70303). [Master thesis, Queen's University] ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/experience-students-as-part-secondary-school/docview/853335124/se-2

The Spring-Time Group. (n.d.). *舞台回顧. [Spring-Time stage].* Retrieved from http://www.springtime.com.hk/

UNESCO. (n.d.). Yueju opera. Retrieved from https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/yueju-opera-00203

Wadler, H. (2022). Co-creating musicals with middle school students. In S. L. Burton (Ed.), *Engaging musical practices: A sourcebook for middle school general music* (2nd ed., pp. 203–221). Oxford University Press.

Watkins, R. L. (2005). *The musical theater experience and the extent to which it affects high school students* (Order No. 3199170). [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois

Urbana-Champaign]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/musical-theater-experience-extent-which-affects/docview/305001887/se-2

Williams, T. S. (2003). *Responsibilities and preparation of public school secondary music specialists in teaching musical theatre.* (Publication No. 3124434). [Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/responsibilites-preparation-public-school/docview/305318844/se-2

Wolf, S. (2019). Disney goes to school. In S. Wolf (Ed.), *Beyond Broadway: The pleasure and promise of musical theatre across America* (New York; online edn., Oxford Academic). https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190639525.003.0008

Wolf, S. (2023). Community musical theater as a human flourishing project. In H. Young. (Ed.), *Theater and human flourishing* (pp. 104-125) Oxford Academic. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197622261.003.0006.

Wu, W.S. (2015). *Approach to music, book 3* (2nd ed.). Hong Kong Music Publisher.

Xiao, Y. (2023). 为何中小学课外音乐活动“止步”高年级 [*Why do extracurricular music activities in primary and secondary schools "stop" at higher grades*]. *中国文艺家*, *(05)*, 137-139. doi:CNKI:SUN:ZWNJ.0.2023-05-050.

Xu, Z., & Zhang, L. (2003). *音乐课外活动 [Extracurricular music activities].* Shanghai Education Press.

Xue, Q. (2012). 以音乐社团形式开展高中音乐课选修模块. [Conducting high school music elective modules in the form of music clubs]. *中国科教创新导刊*, *18*, 231. doi:CNKI:SUN:GWDT.0.2012-18-218.

Yang, L. (2007). 农村高中音乐演奏模块教学的实践与反思 [Practice and reflection on teaching rural high school music performance modules]. *中国音乐教育, 2007*(5), 12-15. DOI:10.3969/j.issn.1003-1138.2007.05.006.

Yuen-fun, M. (2022). Summary report of the Jockey Club "*The joy of youth music and the road" Character education musical theatre project*. Hong Kong Repertory Theatre.

Zhang, T. (2022). 地方戏曲在音乐教育中的传承与创新探讨 [Exploring the inheritance and innovation of local opera in music education]. *教育教学论坛Education and Teaching Forum*, *33,* 65-68.

Zhejiang Province Musicians' Association. (2022). Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macao. *The education of music. 中小學音乐教育* , *06*, Front

Appendix A

Musical Audition Form (For teacher)

Name: Class:
Student number:

Are you free to rehearse during the following sections? Check Yes or No in each box.

Again, place times in order in one column.

	Rehearsal Schedule	Yes	No
1	26/5 10:00-13:00		
2	28/5 13:15-14:00		
3	30/5 13:15-14:00		
4	1/6 14:00-17:30		
5	4/6 13:15-14:00		
6	6/6 13:15-14:00		
7	9/6 10:00-13:00 (video recording)		

Voice part you sing (if know)：

	Soprano		Alto		Tenor		Bass		unsure

Which part are you auditioning for? Check the box(es) that interest you.

	female leading role		male leading role
	female supporting role		male supporting role
	chorus		dancer

Please list any previous acting or singing experience:

_____

_____

_____

Evaluation:

	1	2	3	4	5	Comments
Singing Voice quality						
Singing Voice progection						
Speaking Voice Quality						
Speaking Voice progection						
Appearance for Part						
Interpretation of Lines						
Movement or Dance						

Key: 1=very low; 5=very high

Appendix B
Consent from

Secondary School Student Letter of Intent

Dear parent(s)/guardian,

My name is Shihan Lin. I have taught music for seven years in the Colégio Dom Bosco (Yuet Wah). I am currently enrolled in a Master of Music Education degree program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, US. In addition to traditional classroom coursework, I am writing a thesis paper. The thesis research project will focus on creating a teacher's guide for producing musical theatre in school. The goal is to transform musical theatre from academic learning to practical learning, providing students with a rich performance-based musical theatre experience. For my project to be successful, I will need to record the teacher's process and students' responses. This will take place during class rehearsals and small-group interviews.

To begin this data collection, I am writing to ask your permission for your son or daughter to participate in this research project. Should you agree to allow your child to participate, your child will be invited to audition for the musical as well as formal rehearsals. The rehearsal times for the show are as follows:

	Rehearsal Schedule
1	26/5 10:00-13:00
2	28/5 13:15-14:00
3	30/5 13:15-14:00
4	1/6 14:00-17:30
5	4/6 13:15-14:00
6	6/6 13:15-14:00
7	9/6 10:00-13:00 (video recording)

Following the final recording, I will ask students who consented to be in the project to participate in small-group interviews. Should this occur, the interview will take approximately 15 minutes and will be arranged during a mutually convenient time during the school day. I also plan to video record all rehearsals to help in my data collection.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time, and may in addition, skip or refuse to answer any survey or interview question. **Participation and information disclosed in this study will not affect your child's academic grade in any way**. All information that is gathered for this study will be held in strict confidence. Student names will not be disclosed in the document. Results from this study will be made available to you and your child upon request. All data collected from surveys and video recordings will be destroyed at the end of the research study.

Should you have questions regarding any part of this research project, you may contact either myself at +853 63226910, chaamlam@umich.edu; or the faculty advisor for my study, Dr. Marie McCarthy, Professor of Music Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, 734-647-0557, mfmcc@umich.edu.

I have listed the project activities your child may be involved in on the following page. If you wish to allow your child to participate in this study without any limitations, no further action is needed. If there is any activity listed that you prefer your child to **not** participate in, please indicate this by checking the appropriate box or boxes and return this letter to me.

I am excited about beginning this project. As an outcome of the project, I hope to better understand students' musical needs and interests and ultimately to share findings with other music teachers to better serve students.

Thank you,
Shihan Lin

If there is any activity you prefer your child ***not*** to be involved in, please indicate so by checking the appropriate box or boxes and send the form back to school with your child.

- □ fill out a survey that will be completed anonymously
- □ participate in video-recorded and an anonymous questionnaire led by Ms. Lin
- □ participate in video-recorded small-group interviews with Ms. Lin

I,_____, do not wish for
_____ to participate in the above-indicated activities.

_____
Signature Date

Appendix C

Audition result

Dear and parents

Congratulations! You have been chosen for the part of ( ) in our musical project *Dalia*. You may not have gotten the part you really wanted, but you are still a member of a wonderful cast. The audition project is always a difficult one for the students as well as for the director. It is, however, an important process that builds character and prepares you for your high school experiences. Self-confidence and believing in yourself are important areas of growth to nurture. We are delighted to offer you this opportunity and look forward to working with you. Thanks to you and your parents for your patience and understanding during the auditions.

Our rehearsals will begin immediately with learning the music. Beginning in May we will rehearse from May 26 to June 9. Please remember that as we draw closer to our production date we may have to extend the rehearsal times.

Before the final video recording, we need parents' support to provide the following costumes to help your child portray their character better:

_____

_____

Please feel free to call me with any questions or concerns at +853 63226910
Sincerely,
Shihan Lin

Kindly detach and return to Shihan Lin immediately.
My son/daughter accepts his/her role in the musical *Dalia* and understands the responsibilities of attending all rehearsals and performances.

_____ _____

Student name Parent signature and phone number

Appendix D

Questionnaire after the *Dalia* musical theatre project

1) Which of the following performance forms do you think musical theatre encompasses? (You can circle more than one option)

   A. Music B. Dance C. Drama

2) How many MT shows have you participated in before?

   A. None

   B. One

   C. Two, or more than two times

3) Have you watched musicals outside of school?

   A. Never B. Sometimes C. A lot

4) Did you enjoy the music rehearsals for *Dalia*? Please draw a circle.

Like a lot	Likely	Neither likely nor unlikely.	Unlikely	Very unlikely
1	2	3	4	5

5) Would you like to participate in the school's musical theatre program in the future?

   A. yes B. maybe C. no

6) What performance skills do you think you've gained from this musical theatre program? (You can choose more than one)

   A. Vocal skills
   B. Music reading skills
   C. Dramatic skills
   D. Speech skills
   E. Dancing skills
   F. Auditory awareness

7) What other skills do you think you've gained from this musical program? (You can choose more than one)

   A. Teamwork

   B. motivation to perform

   C. Self-expression

   D. A sense of belonging

   E. Closer relationships with teachers and teammates

8) How would you describe this project to others?

Appendix E

Interview Questions

Teachers Interview Questions

Musical Theatre in the School Curriculum

1. As a music teacher in a secondary school, how do you think students' level of understanding and participation differs when the study of Musical Theatre moves from being a unit in the music curriculum to an extracurricular performance? activity?
2. Do you think this project has the potential to be implemented in the general music class?
3. I know Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School (Macao) has been implementing class competitions for mini-musicals in the 11th grade for many years; how do you think this musical theatre project might affect the students' participation in the 11th 11th-grade musical theatre interclass competition?
4. This project was conducted through a collaboration model involving school music teachers, extracurricular activity teachers, and external teachers. What does it take to make that work more effectively? How do you see the potential of the model as a head of music department?

Value to Students

5. Students mentioned in interviews that they enjoyed performing as a group and exploring unfamiliar areas together. They also felt a sense of growth through the acting process. From what your observed in the rehearsals, do you think students' teamwork skills improved? How do you think that happened?
6. Many students mentioned a sense of growth, and especially their growth in self-confidence on stage; that came as a surprise to me [which was unexpected for me]. From students teasing each other in the early stages of rehearsals to later improving

together based on each other's give and take in their acting performances. But actually we didn't specifically emphasize self-confidence in classroom. Does the students' response surprise you?

7. Based on your past experience with students, do you think the students' performance skills have improved?
8. How do you feel about the overall value of musical theatre in addition to performance skills?

Beyong Your School

9. If this project expands to more schools, do you have any suggestions for improvement?
10. What advice would you give to secondary school music teachers about teaching musical theatre?

Student Focus Group Interview Questions

1. How did your understanding of MT change after the project, tell me about it
2. What performance skills things did you learn from the project?
3. What other kinds of skills did you learn from the musical project?
4. Are there any things that you learned from your peers?
5. Do you want to continue musical theatre learning due to this experience?
6. Is this like the Cantonese popular music that you listened to?
7. What's the most memorable part of this project?
8. What challenges did you feel during the rehearsal process?
9. Anything else you would like to share we didn't talk about?

Appendix F

Participation in Musical Theatre Activity Cantonese Version

REF NO:0089/REG/2023

參與音樂劇活動

敬啟者：

為使學生獲得全人發展，本校一向強調藝術教育的重要性，一直與國內、外大學緊密聯繫。現獲美國密歇根大學安娜堡分校邀請與本校合作錄製音樂劇選段。　貴子女獲學校選拔成為演出成員之一。是次活動非常難得，祈　貴家長鼓勵子女積極參與。

附上練習及演出日期、時間、地點：

	排練日程
1	28/5 13:15-14:00
2	30/5 13:15-14:00
3	1/6 14:00-17:30
4	4/6 13:15-14:00
5	6/6 13:15-14:00
6	9/6 10:00-13:00 (錄像)

地點為蔡高中學

此致

貴家長

聖公會(澳門)蔡高中學 中學部 教務處 (2) SHENG KUNG HUI CHOI KOU SCHOOL (MACAU)

聖公會澳門蔡高中學教務處

2024 年 5 月 27 日

回 條

敬覆者：

貴校通告已閱，本人 同意/不同意 子女參加「音樂劇錄製」活動，並將督促子女在表演期間遵守學校紀律。

此覆

聖公會(澳門)蔡高中學

班別：_____

學生：_____

家長：_____

2024 年 5 月____日

Appendix G

REF NO:0033/REG/2023

Participation in Musical Theatre Activity

Dear Parents,

To promote the holistic development of our students, our school has always emphasized the importance of arts education and maintained close collaborations with renowned institutions both domestically and internationally. We are honored to have been invited by the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, to collaborate on the recording of a musical theatre excerpt. Your child has been selected to participate as one of the performers. This is a rare and valuable opportunity, and we sincerely hope you will encourage your child to actively participate.

Attached are the rehearsal and performance dates, times, and locations:

	Rehearsal Schedule
1	28/5 13:15-14:00
2	30/5 13:15-14:00
3	1/6 14:00-17:30
4	4/6 13:15-14:00
5	6/6 13:15-14:00
6	9/6 10:00-13:00 (Recording)

Location: Choi Kou School Macau

Yours sincerely,

Academic Affairs Office

Sheng Kung Hui Choi Kou School Macau
27th May 2024

Reply Slip

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have read the school notice and **agree/do not agree** to my child's participation in the "Musical Theatre Recording" activity. I will ensure that my child adheres to the school's specified discipline during the performance.

Yours faithfully,

Sheng Kung Hui (Macau) Choi Kou School

Class: _____
Student: _____
Parent: _____
Date: _____ May 2024