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Using singing games in music lessons to enhance young children's social skills

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Abstract

The ability to develop social relationships with peers has long been regarded as one of the most important development tasks of childhood. The acquisition of social skills is very significant during early childhood; however, these skills are rarely taught in Hong Kong kindergartens. Teachers tend to reinforce quiet and obedient classroom behavior.

To enhance children's social skills, music provides the opportunity for not only aesthetic and creative development, but also social development. Music serves to create social groups because it helps each child feel a part of a group. Music can draw a shy, withdrawn child into a group, encourage all children to come into closer contact with their peers, and support social relationships.

The paper aims to investigate how children's social skills and competence are enhanced by incorporating new songs into a musical game. The subjects were twenty children aged from five to six in an Upper level (K. 3) class in a Hong Kong kindergarten. Thirty-minute music lessons were conducted once a week for eight consecutive weeks in the kindergarten. The first four music lessons were taught using a traditional Chinese teaching approach, whereas the last four music lessons were taught with the added elements of new songs and creative movement games. Data were collected through class observations, video recordings, and a checklist of social

attributes (McClellan & Katz, 1993). The results of the study revealed that the musical games in the music lessons cultivated young children's social development and skills. The children shared in a large group, established close connections, and built their confidence, cooperation, curiosity, and communication through musical games and movement. They were given ways to express themselves that improved their self-confidence and self-esteem, establish positive relationships and maintain positive interactions with peers, take turns fairly, accept and enjoy peers in their group, and interact non-verbally with other children with smiles or nods.

Introduction

The ability to develop social relationships with peers has long been regarded as one of the most important developmental tasks of childhood (Hartup, 1989; Jewett, 1992; McClellan & Katz, 1993; Lau, 2002). Children's behaviors that lead to social acceptance or rejection by peers may be the result of children's early social and emotional experiences that occur in the context of families or schools. Research indicates that children's everyday experiences in relationships with their parents are fundamental to their developing social skills (Cohn, Patterson & Christopoulos, 1991; Parke & Ladd, 1992). Parental responsiveness and nurturance are considered to be key factors in the development of children's social competence (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Although parents and families provide the foundation for children's social skills development, schools and kindergartens are the main places where children learn to get along with their peers. Teachers can be good facilitators and models to enhance children's social skills. They can play the role of facilitators or advisers to promote children's competence with peers in the classroom through various play activities. Research has shown that teachers can guide young children's social development and be active mediators of their social competence (Edwards, 1986; Hazen, Black & Fleming-Johnson, 1984; Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren & Soderman, 1988;

Ladd, 1984, 2005; Mize, Ladd & Price, 1985; Lau, 2007). If experienced and trained teachers working with young children in kindergarten demonstrate a positive acceptance of each child at an early stage, this can help children discover and appreciate their own uniqueness at a later period of schooling (Curriculum Development Council (C.D.C.), 1996, 2006). Children can learn skills from teachers in school if they become good friends by practicing friendship, connecting with other children and adults, and developing social skills that help them “click” with others (Lau, 2005). Burton (1986) stated that children who were able to form close or satisfying relationships with peers had opportunities to learn social skills that would be important throughout their lives.

For teachers, teaching social skills to children is much harder than teaching academic subjects such as mathematics or science. Healthy social skills are the foundation for getting along with others, and come from interactions with both peers and adults. Children who lack social skills can experience problems such as behavioral difficulties in school, inattentiveness, peer rejection, emotional difficulties, bullying, difficulty in making friends, aggressiveness, problems in interpersonal relationships, academic failure, difficulty concentrating, isolation from peers, and depression (Lau, 2005). If children do not have friends or playmates, they can be frustrated, even hurt. As social development begins in the early years, it is appropriate that all early childhood programs include regular assessment of children’s progress in the acquisition of social competence (McClellan & Katz, 1993), which is one of the most important aspects of children’s development (Wortham, 2002).

In Hong Kong, the Pre-primary Curriculum Guide (C.D.C., 1996) emphasizes that “children should equip themselves with life skills, such as communicative skills and social skills so as to enable them to adapt to society” (p. 1). In November 1996, it

was noted in the consultation document of *Education Commission Report No. 7* that schools need to “impart confidence and social skills to students to help them communicate effectively in community life” (p. 11). More recently, the updated Guide states, “Children should learn to establish good interpersonal relationships through negotiation and co-operation, and to accept basic social values” (C.D.C., 2006, p. 20). Social skills are recognized by the Curriculum Development Council as an important element in the development of young children (2006), and the Council’s direction and recommendations are in harmony with the vision and overall aims of education for the twenty-first century outlined in the Education Commission’s report, *Education Blueprint for the 21st Century - Review of Academic System: Aims of Education*, published in January 1999 (Hong Kong Education Commission, 1999).

Social skills can be defined as “the ability to implement developmentally appropriate social behaviors that enhance one’s interpersonal relationships without causing harm to anyone” (Schneider, 1993, p. 19). The “ability to implement” implies that an individual requires skill to actually be able to display an appropriate behavior. Social skills include daily interaction skills such as sharing, taking turns, and allowing others to talk without interrupting. The category of social skills can also be expanded to include facets of self-control such as appropriate anger management. For many children, social skills are learned by observing how others in their environment handle social situations. Children then imitate desirable responses such as turn taking and apply the skills and so become adept at performing other activities that require them to wait for others (Lau, 2005).

Music is one of the domains of the pre-primary curriculum. It provides children with opportunities for not only aesthetic and creative development, but also social development (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006). Leonhard

(1983) asserts, “Music is by its very nature a social art.” It creates social groups because it helps each person feel a part of a group. Hence, social skills develop as children feel they are a part of a group. Music can draw a shy, withdrawn child into a group, encourage all children to come into closer contact with their peers, and support social relationships (Spodek & Saracho, 1994), and encourage participation, sharing and cooperation (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001). Many teachers have found that for a child who is having difficulties making friends or sharing in a large group, music games can help the child develop close connections by building his/her confidence, cooperation, curiosity, and communication. Involving children in music activities gives them a way to express themselves that improves their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Wortham (2002) argues that “play is an important component for children’s social development” (p. 273). By promoting children’s social skills, play provides an avenue for social development. Arnaud (1971) maintains that “play is a major vehicle for constructive socialization when shared with other children which widens empathy with others, and lessens egocentrism” (p. 5). Young children can “experience the joy of co-operating and sharing with others” (C.D.C., 2006, p. 51) through play experiences such as taking turns and helping each other. However, it is found that teachers use didactic methods to transmit knowledge and social values to children rather than interactive methods, even though children retain knowledge gained from interactive activities much better than they do that from lecturing. Teachers tend to reinforce quiet and obedient classroom behavior (Wong & Chu, 2001; Lau, 2002, 2005). Children are rarely given specific instructions on how to cope with interpersonal activities such as making friends and handling disagreements. Teachers encourage children to sit quietly while working at a desk, and to write and work more

on worksheets (Lau, 2001, 2002) instead of enhancing children's social skills through play activities.

Play and interaction with peers promotes the shift from moral reasoning, which is guided by egocentrism, to autonomous moral reasoning, which is characterized by autonomy, reciprocity, and cooperation (Piaget, 1932, cited in Catron & Allen, 2003, p. 28). By providing children with this opportunity, they learn to take the role of other people, and they are allowed to participate in decisions about rules. They also learn to express themselves verbally, listen to another child's point of view, and decide on a plan of action that will solve the problem. Play helps children learn to be peacemakers through play experiences that help them develop the ability to negotiate, resolve conflicts, communicate and co-operate with peers, and solve problems in a constructive atmosphere (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1985; C.D.C., 2006; Peachey, 1981). For the young child, play is important work. A child grows, learns, and investigates the world through play. When children interact with one another, they influence each other's development (Fromberg & Bergen, 2006, p. xviii). This happens through simple or complex play activities, or musical activities that invite the child to think, solve problems, and participate in fantasy (Catron & Allen, 2003).

As children learn through play, musical play serves an important role in the development of their social skills (C.D.C., 2006). It encourages participation, sharing, and cooperation. Through a simple musical activity such as group musical singing games, children learn to subordinate their individual wishes to the goals of the group, which is the essence of cooperation (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001). Catron and Allen (2003) argue that "young children must learn to cooperate with peers and act in a socially responsible manner, and that they develop a cooperative spirit through participating in a variety of small-group activities" (p. 213).

Musical activities such as songs, musical games, and rhythmic movement are fun and enjoyable ways for children to learn social skills (Lau, 2005). Simple sing-along songs, for example, are easy for children to learn. If the songs touch on values and principles, the children begin to incorporate them into their social development. It is known that children tend to absorb social values much better when they do not realize that they are being taught. Musical games allow children to sing aloud, move, and dance around or create certain hand gestures for parts of songs, and also allow them to release social and emotional problems. Children constantly experience new emotions and situations when they are growing up. Each new experience they have contributes to their social development. When children are dealing with these new experiences, they can learn from them. Children concentrate better on activities than on academic textbooks.

Research has documented the effectiveness of music in enhancing children's social skills, especially when interventions and instructions involve the use of participatory activities (Forsyth, 1977; Madsen & Alley, 1979; Sim, 1986; Standley & Hughes, 1996). Music has been recognized as an effective way to foster children's social behavior. Children who are lacking social skills can learn from children who are socially competent (Wortham, 2002). Teachers can give demonstrations, provide and suggest feedback, ask open-ended questions to inquire into children's thought processes, and ask them to share their understandings, imaginings, and feelings (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004). Other instructional approaches and experiences such as "coaching, modeling, reinforcement, and peer pairing are also effective in increasing children's social skills" (Oden, 2000, retrieved from <http://ericae.net/edo/ED281610.htm>). In addition, teachers can organize special games such as musical games, where less socially competent children are paired with

children who have acquired effective social skills. Through play experiences, the less skilled child can learn to play more effectively. Teachers should be able to construct appropriate social learning environments and design related activities for young children to help instill in them the concept that each person is unique (Lau, 2001, 2002), and help them to acquire self-awareness and learn about the immediate community.

However, kindergarten teachers “devote far too much time and lay emphasis to the technique on the singing of songs” (Tripathi, 2004, p. 58). The technique typically used to teach songs is repetition. The majority of kindergarten teachers prefer to use repetition when teaching young children to sing, that is, children are asked to repeat a song several times until they can perform it well. Moreover, the teaching resources and materials available for teachers in the kindergarten field are very limited (Wong & Chu, 2001). Some publishing companies publish teaching packages for kindergartens, but these rarely contain high-quality songs, and are based on themes such as winter, spring, and transportation. In Hong Kong, the number of music experts and educators in the early childhood field is small. A few of them have written lyrics for and/or composed creative and developmentally appropriate high-quality songs for kindergarten children (Wong & Chu, 2001), but there appears to be no songs about enhancing social skills. Kindergarten teachers have difficulty finding quality children’s songs (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001, p. 162).

The traditional “Good Morning” song (Chinese version) is one of the songs commonly used by teachers to enhance children’s social skills. When singing this song, the major focus is on acquiring the rules of the song through singing together. Children often labor for a long time to perform even simple songs (Andress, 1980; Wright, 2003). Through the “Good Morning” song, children have become so

organized by teachers in kindergartens that they no longer have time for their own spontaneous games during such kinds of songs.

The “Good Morning” song is in triple meter ($\frac{3}{4}$ time) (i.e., the accent falls on the first of every three beats). However, this song begins with a weaker beat that is followed by three quarter notes (crotchets). Children usually find this form of beat arrangement difficult because they are “still learning to recognize intonation and meter” (C.D.C., 1996, p. 88). The complete triple meter is usually easier.

In the “Hello” song (Appendix A), the quadruple meter ($\frac{4}{4}$ time) is prominent, and starts with an accent on the first of every four complete quarter notes. Rhythmically, children feel the basic beat through clapping and stepping in time with the beat while participating in singing games. The “Hello” song is syncopated and has a choppy rhythm. This helps develop children’s musical understanding. The children are given an inner feeling for differences in pitch and rhythm found in melody. They are able to “express these differences through singing” (Wheeler & Raebeck, 1985, p. 93). Children can participate in a variety of group singing games with simple movements to the “Hello” song.

Purpose of Study

In this study, I wanted to see how musical activities enhance and strengthen children’s social learning experiences. These activities included musical games, singing songs, and creative movement. Two songs (appendices A and B) that were composed by the investigator were taught in a Hong Kong kindergarten to enhance children’s social skills. The purpose of this study was to see if children’s social skills could be enhanced by incorporating new songs into singing games during music lessons in Hong Kong kindergartens. By using a checklist adapted from the Social

Attribute Checklist of McClellan and Katz (1993) during the music lessons, I investigated whether singing games are effective in cultivating young children's social skills, such as establishing positive relationships, maintaining positive interactions with peers, taking turns fairly, accepting and enjoying peers in one's group, and interacting non-verbally with other children with smiles or nods.

Methodology

Twenty children aged from five to six in an Upper class (K. 3) were randomly chosen to join in the study. All of them were in the last year of kindergarten. It was anticipated that in the study, the children would express themselves with confidence, establish positive relationships and maintain positive interactions with peers, interact with other children with smiles and nods, take turns fairly with peers, and accept and enjoy peers of his or her group, and that their social skills would be enhanced through singing and movement lessons. A teacher of the Upper class worked in conjunction with the investigator to implement the study. The teacher led the music activity while the investigator acted as an observer. An assistant teacher was invited to be an inter-rater to observe the music activity and score the children on each item in the checklist to establish inter-rater reliability. In addition, videotaping was used to identify targeted behaviors and social skills to ascertain a satisfactory rate of inter-rater reliability.

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in a privately run, government-subsidized half-day kindergarten that is located on the Hong Kong Island. The data were collected from mid-February to mid-April in the second semester of the 2004-2005 school year. An

Upper class teacher was invited by the investigator to conduct eight music lessons with twenty children from her K. 3 class. A 30-minute music lesson was conducted once a week in the Upper class over eight consecutive teaching weeks. The eight lessons were split into two phases during the data-collection period: the first four lessons constituted phase 1 and the last four constituted phase 2. Twenty randomly selected children aged from 5 to 6 were invited to participate in the study without any special consideration for their musical ability. The children who were invited were required to obtain consent letters from their parents before they were allowed to join in the study.

Data Collection

Three research instruments were used: class observation with anecdotes, videotaping, and a checklist adapted from the Social Attribute Checklist of McClellan and Katz (1993). In addition to the rating conducted by the investigator, a rater who was the assistant of the teacher was invited to score each child on each item on the checklist. This gave reasonable assurance that the investigator and rater were rating the children at the same time on the social behavior. The checklist, observations, and videos were used to triangulate the results. All lessons were videotaped and observed by the investigator and assistant teacher, who were non-participant observers. This helped them watch more objectively and carefully what was happening and become more analytical about the information they recorded (Martin, 2004). The data collected from the observations with anecdotes provided a useful selection of social behavior and skills.

During the eight music lessons, a video recorder was set up on a tripod and placed in an unobtrusive spot to record the children's group interactions. The teacher

provided the children with opportunities to solve problems by thinking about the actions they could do to the “Hello” song (such as shaking hands, clapping hands, nodding heads to respond to each other) and the “Bubble” song, which provided the children with opportunities to express their feelings and ideas, support and cooperate with each other, and respect each other’s individual abilities and interests. Each child’s playing, moving, interacting, approaching others, respecting and accepting peers, initiating contact with others and taking turns were included in the videotapes for review by the investigator and assistant teacher. Reviewing the videotapes repeatedly helped the observers acquire information on many different attributes of children’s social skills in a group context.

Procedure

In the first four weeks, from mid-February to mid-March (phase one), the teacher conducted four music lessons. Based on the routine music lesson plan, which involved breath exercises and pitch practice, the teacher used the traditional Chinese “Good Morning” greeting song to teach social skills. Children were asked either to sit or stand while singing songs, and were required to be seated when playing games. They were provided with some non-locomotive games such as moving while remaining in their own seats and passing the present box following the background music from a disc player. In the last four lessons from mid-March to mid-April (phase two), the teacher was asked to conduct a fun and interactive 30-minute music lesson that was designed by the investigator. This involved the introduction of two new songs that included actions and games, “Hello, hello and how are you?” (see Appendix A) and the “Bubble” song (see Appendix B). These two songs provided children with chances to reach out to other children and make friends with one

another in groups of two or four. Traditionally, when singing Chinese songs children simply stand and sing the lyrics, but with the new songs, the children could welcome and greet each other in a wonderful way, with warmth and friendliness. They could approach and initiate interactions with other peers positively, respect and accept each other's ideas, take turns, and interact with others with smiles and nods. The musical activities enhanced their social skills in a way that the old songs could not. The data collected from twenty children were used for analysis.

While the children were singing and playing in the musical lessons, a checklist of social attributes (McClellan & Katz, 1993) was used by both the investigator and assistant teacher to record and summarize the children's social skills in three categories: i) social skill attributes, ii) individual attributes, and iii) peer relationship attributes. The investigator and assistant teacher observed and recorded the presence or absence of these social attributes more than one child at a time for further analysis.

Results

The main focus of this paper is to examine the possibility of incorporating two new songs into singing games to enhance children's social skills in kindergarten. The results of the study reveal the achievement of the ultimate goal of the musical activities: that is, the new songs in the music lessons cultivated young children's social development and enhanced their social skills. This study showed that the most important social skills that children learned in the musical activities were establishing positive relationships and maintaining positive interactions with peers, taking turns fairly, showing interest in others, accepting and enjoying peers of the child's own group, interacting verbally and non-verbally with other children with smiles or nods, and showing cooperation, self-control, confidence, independence, and empathy.

Observations of the children

In the first phase of lessons, in general, the children enjoyed the lessons. They seemed to move slightly from egocentricity to social interaction. However, they seemed to do poorly on many of the items on the checklist (Table 1). They had difficulties establishing more satisfying relationships with other children. They were deficient in finding ways to learn from and enjoy the company of one another because there were insufficient opportunities for the children to reach other peers during the activity. The children sometimes exhibited negative social behaviors, such as aggression, when finding friends to play with.

In the second phase of lessons, the musical activities provided opportunities for the children to play and interact with their peers. The children were observed to be able to overcome social difficulties. They had the chance to reach out to other children and make friends with one another and in groups of two. Most of the children laughed and enjoyed themselves very much during the activities. They accepted and enjoyed the peers in their group, and sometimes interacted non-verbally with other children with smiles or nods. Guided both by the investigator and their innate curiosity, the children applied some important problem-solving skills and social skills right in the midst of their playing.

At the start of the music lesson, the "Hello Song" (Appendix A) was initiated to communicate what each child should do sequentially when greeting someone. Children were invited to sing the song and practiced the greetings in a game format. They responded naturally to the rhythm and melody, and sang and moved to the beat of the song. At the very beginning, the children could not sing the words because the tune and lyrics were new, but most of them had a sense of the rhythm and melody, and the teacher's movement captured most of their attention. They loved to participate

by clapping their hands in time with the melody. They felt the thrill of achievement when they knew the words and how to play the greeting game. They expressed greetings by singing “Hello, hello, hello, hello” (waving hands) and negotiating with their partners the way that they wanted to act out the play pattern of “How are you?” (such as shaking hands, clapping hands, nodding heads, turning around, telling partner’s names, and so forth). After playing and singing the song a few times, the children were asked to change their partners and discuss the play pattern of the game. All of them turned around and looked for another partner by asking “Would you like to be my partner?” or “Could you be my partner?” They found new partners and interacted cooperatively in pairs of two in a group musical activity.

Only one child (Ben) was somewhat egocentric and less sensitive compared to other children. Another child (Shirley) was observed to show empathy and react appropriately to her partner by helping the frustrated child to complete a difficult movement task. Shirley used more sophisticated methods of offering comfort by holding her partner’s hands and demonstrating the movement. She approached the child positively, showed her concern, and established a positive relationship with her peer.

The “Hello” song allowed the children to explore the things they were learning—sound, language, physical movement, and even social skills. They shook hands, clapped hands, and nodded heads to respond to each other. The greeting activity taught the children how group interactions work. They initiated and developed contact with others. Children’s own grouping choices were fostered and respected. The children began to learn that everyone in a group could be a leader, and that compromise was essential. During the musical activity, often one or two children would want to be the leader of the group and make all the decisions about the play

pattern (such as clapping hands, nodding heads, turning around, or shaking hands). The children began to learn to contribute equally in a manner that was most beneficial for the group. They learned to accept each other's ideas and respect each other's interests so as to cooperate and resolve conflicts. They developed social skills such as taking turns and working and sharing their ideas with others. The children found ways to work through problems and express themselves.

Another song, "Bubble Song" (Appendix B), was introduced after the "Hello Song". It was a singing game with creative movement. The children were asked to imagine that they were blowing bubbles (rhythmic movement accompanying piano music). Next, they were asked to pretend to be the wind that was blowing the bubbles, and then to be the bubbles that were like feathers flying up higher and higher in the sky (with the original tune played an octave higher). The children were asked to respond to fast and slow tempi with whole body movement, and then freeze, pretending the bubbles burst when the music stopped. However, the children bumped into each other while moving. With the teacher's guidance, they were asked to cooperate and pair up in groups of two. They finally cooperated with each other and each pair formed a big bubble by moving close together or forming a big bubble by linking their hands.

The children's movement to music showed that they had a limited creative movement repertoire. They appeared to need instruction in movement to develop a creative movement repertoire. The teacher tried to teach the children to keep time accurately through the blowing-bubble movement. Children's fine motor skills are usually learned through imitation. The motor patterns that the teacher taught were compatible with the children's physical and maturational stages of development. They expressed a controlled muscular response. They also moved expressively. They were

able to imitate accurately rhythmic patterns, and to synchronize their movement with the music, that is, keep the beat. The children's rhythmic movement was creative. They started by learning the movements that the teacher teach them, then rearranged and changed the movements to create their own physical expressions.

During the movement game, the children's confidence was monitored when they attempted the challenging bubble activity. When they were asked to imagine that they were blowing the bubbles, they were independent and autonomous. They had the opportunity to develop self-help skills and independence, and were not excessively dependent on the teacher. Although the children appeared somewhat frustrated by the movement repertoire at the beginning, they still performed in a positive mood and kept the beat with their movement, and moved expressively to the music.

The children listened attentively to the melody. When the tune was played an octave lower and higher, they pretended to be the wind blowing the bubbles and the bubbles flying up high in the sky, respectively. Opportunities were created to encourage the children to express their feelings and ideas. The children appeared to demonstrate socially appropriate ways to express their feelings. The game provided them with the chance to support and cooperate with each other. They respected each other's individual abilities and interests. The game provided opportunities for social interaction, and the children initiated and developed contact with their peers.

The children froze when the song came to an end. They listened attentively and were encouraged to group themselves in twos to discuss and contribute ideas for a freeze statue. They worked cooperatively to express their freeze statue when pretending the bubbles burst. They responded with smiles and nodded at each other when freezing. They were required to imagine and give verbal responses to the places where the bubbles had fallen or were lying. The children made relevant contributions

to the ongoing activities, and expressed their feelings in socially appropriate ways. They had opportunities to release their feelings and express emotion through the musical activity.

Summary of the Checklist

Both the investigator and assistant teacher evaluated the children's social attributes. The assistant teacher found the checklist easy to use. She required very little instruction and training and quickly learned to use it. Few discrepancies arose between the results marked on the checklist by the assistant teacher and those by the investigator. The following tables summarize the social skills that children learned in the three categories (i.e., social attributes, individual attributes, and peer relationship attributes) in the first four musical activities in the first phase (Table 1) and the last four musical activities in the second phase (Table 2).

Table 1
Social attributes children learned in first phase

<i>Singing games and movement</i>	<i>Category of attributes</i>	<i>Social skills children learned in the music lesson</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>
Singing game: <i>Hello, hello, and how are you?</i> (Appendix A)	Social skills attributes	• Approach and show positive interest in other peers			✓
		• Accept and enjoy peers of his/her group			✓
		• Able to make friends			✓
		• Respect and accept others' interests and ideas			✓
		• Compromise on decisions			
		• Take turns fairly		✓	
		• Respect peers' own grouping choice		✓	✓
Individual attributes	Individual attributes	• Show empathy for and comfort peers			✓
		• Recognize and accept each others differences		✓	
		• Demonstrate positive relationships with peers		✓	
		• Show capacity to care about peers			✓
		• Initiate and develop contact with others			✓
Peer relationship attributes	Peer relationship attributes	• Children are accepted by others			✓
		• Invited by peers to join in the play and keep friendship			✓
		• Respond to each other with a cooperative spirit		✓	
		• Interact with others with smiles and nods			✓
		• Establish positive relationship with peers	✓		
Movement: <i>Bubble, bubble up in the sky</i> (Appendix B)	Social skills attributes	• Show socially appropriate ways of expressing feelings		✓	
		• Respect others' needs, and interests			✓
		• Accept and enjoy playing with peers			✓
		• Interact with others		✓	
		• Initiate and develop contact with others		✓	
		• Play without teacher intervention			✓
Individual attributes	Individual attributes	• Self-esteem and self-concept are fostered and developed: confidence, self-help skills		✓	
		• Experience frustration and see mistakes as opportunities to learn		✓	
		• Become more independent and autonomous			✓
		• Release feelings and express emotion through activity		✓	

Peer relationship attributes	• Respond to each other with a cooperative spirit	✓
	• Interact with others with smiles and nods	✓
	• Establish positive relationships with peers	✓

A checklist adapted from "Assessing the Social Development of Young Children: A Checklist of Social Attributes" (McClellan & Katz, 1993).

Y = Yes, N = No, S = Sometimes.

Table 2
Social attributes children learned in the second phase

<i>Singing games and movement</i>	<i>Category of social attributes</i>	<i>Social skills children learned in the music lesson</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S</i>
Singing game: <i>Hello, hello, and how are you?</i> (Appendix A)	Social skills attributes	• Approach and show positive interest in peers	✓		
		• Accept and enjoy peers of his/her group	✓		
		• Able to make friends	✓		
		• Respect and accept others' interests and ideas	✓		
		• Compromise on decisions			✓
		• Take turns fairly	✓		
		• Respect peers' own grouping choice	✓		
	Individual attributes	• Show empathy for and comfort peers			✓
		• Recognize and accept each other's differences	✓		
		• Demonstrate positive relationships with peers	✓		
		• Show capacity to care about peers	✓		
		• Initiate and develop contact with others	✓		
	Peer relationship attributes	• Children are accepted by others	✓		
		• Invited by peers to join in the play and be friends	✓		
		• Respond to each other with a cooperative spirit	✓		
		• Interact with others with smiles and nods	✓		
		• Establish positive relationships with peers	✓		
Movement: <i>Bubble, bubble up in the sky</i> (Appendix B)	Social skills attributes	• Express feelings in socially appropriate ways	✓		
		• Respect others' needs and interests	✓		
		• Accept and enjoy playing with peers	✓		
		• Interact with others	✓		
		• Initiate and develop contact with others	✓		
		• Play without teacher's intervention			✓

A checklist adapted from "Assessing the Social Development of Young Children: A Checklist of Social Attributes" (McClellan & Katz, 1993).

Y = Yes, N = No, S = Sometimes.

Discussion and Conclusion

The investigator discovered that early childhood music, songs, activities, and games are great ways to teach children about social skills in a fun way. Children's social skills are reinforced in music lessons through singing games that they have learned from their peers and teachers. When the music lesson is taught in a fun and interactive way, it is easier for a child to understand the immersed social skills.

It is obvious that play serves as an important vehicle to teach children social skills (Wortham, 2002; C.D.C., 2006). Bodrova and Leong (2007) argue that children's social skills that are necessary for group acceptance are learned through play. Children learn to be socially competent from other children. Peer social groups develop and change as children participate in undirected play. It is shown that peer culture is transmitted through play (Wortham, 2002). Musical play assists as the best modality to arouse young children's learning and to develop their social skills when integrated with developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Lau, 2005).

The most important role that teachers play in children's development is that of teaching the child social skills. When teachers are spontaneous, warm, and responsive, children show more sympathy and understanding toward one another. Moreover, teachers who deliberately try to respond to children's needs serve as models for children. It is known that if "teachers ... are fully engaged in children's activities, [children will] model responsive interaction, attentiveness, and respect for others" (Catron & Allen, 2003, p. 211). Teachers can use strategies to intervene in and enhance children's social skills to help children to obtain skills and make progress in their social development. Teachers can:

- *Develop interesting musical games and activities.* Using a wide variety of interesting materials, ideas, and various kinds of play activities and musical

games to engage children's natural curiosity will enhance children's social skills. Evidence indicates that novel or unusual activities and materials that engage children cause them to pay close attention. Music is a powerful way to connect with young children and set the stage for close relationships throughout life. "Through a simple musical activity, children learn to subordinate their individual wishes to the goals of the group—the essence of cooperation" (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001, p. 166).

- *Provide children with opportunities to play with peers.* Children gain experience in music play from interacting with peers and are able to maintain stable and long-lasting relationships with other children they like over long periods. For instance, they can be paired up for special play experiences that may lead to their musical games together afterward (Hendrick & Weissman, 2007).
- *Play with children in a "peer-like" way.* Children learn crucial social skills through play with other children. Children whose teachers frequently participate and play with them have more advanced social skills and get along better with peers. Lindsey, Mize, and Pettit (in press) confirm that when adults play with children in an effectively positive and peer-like way, children become more socially competent.
- *Intervene and give children direct suggestions for using successful social behavior.* Teachers can give demonstrations, ask open-ended questions and offer suggestions, or give instructions (MacNaughton & Williams, 2004) that lead children to demonstrate successful behavior such as asking for a turn, initiating invitation, having an awareness of others' feelings, showing the capacity to empathize, approaching and interacting with peers in an

appropriate manner, and interacting non-verbally with other children with smiles, waves, or nods.

Successful social development is critical in early childhood years. The plans made for social development in the music program for young children can play a significant role. The foundation established through music experiences in social development will make it possible for the developing children to appreciate other people in their expanding understanding of the world.

As children learn cooperating, sharing, and helping skills, they make progress in socialization, that is, they are able to get along with other people (C.D.C., 2006). If children's socialization conforms to the school environment, they will find their adjustment to school very easy. Successful socialization development in turn depends on other developmental skills, including controlling and expressing feelings appropriately, developing empathy, and developing prosocial skills.

Young children love to learn, move, and vocalize as they act upon their small world. They are born to be immensely active and energetic when engaging in musical activities. A kindergarten music program can provide one of the most important avenues for young children to learn social skills meaningfully and joyfully. By experiencing life through developmentally appropriate activities, young children have ample opportunities to listen, sing, play, and move, which are important components for the development of social skills. This is a new challenge for both education practitioners and kindergarten teachers to face and follows the curriculum focus in the twenty-first century in Hong Kong: "All students should be entitled to the learning experiences that correspond to *social skills* and *aesthetics* for whole-person development featured in learning through play" (C.D.C., 2001, p. 20).

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Dr Lau is currently a music consultant in the Creative Children Choir in Hong Kong. She was invited as a consultant and director of ETV Pre-primary Programme of which the programme was transmitted on Asia Television (ATV) and Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). A teaching package with CD ROM (Series 1) was produced and distributed to local kindergartens through Educational Television Curriculum Resource Section of the Education and Manpower Bureau in 2004.

Appendix A

Hello Hello and How Are You?

Hel~ lo Hel~ lo Hel~ lo Hel~ lo and how are you? Hel~

³ lo Hel~ lo Hel~ lo Hel~ lo and how are you? Hel~ lo Hel~ lo Hel~ lo Hel~ lo and

⁶ how are you? I am fine, thank you and you my friend?

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff contains the first line of lyrics. The second staff begins with a measure rest marked '3' and continues the melody. The third staff begins with a measure rest marked '6' and concludes the piece.

Appendix B

Bubble Song

Bub - ble Bub - ble Bub - ble Bub - ble like a fea - ther up in the sky

⁵ Bub - ble Bub - ble Bub - ble Bub - ble like a fea - ther up in the sky

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff contains the first line of lyrics. The second staff begins with a measure rest marked '5' and continues the melody.

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