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A Mentoring Approach to Enhancing Early Childhood Music Education: A Hong Kong Case Study

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Abstract

Mentoring has long been recognized as an effective approach in the professional development of teachers since it combines career advancement and psychosocial development (Kram, 1988). While a body of mentoring research in music education focusing on professional development exists (Benson, 2008; Conway, 2008; Haack, 2006), there is little evidence that the benefits arising from the process have been recognized or acted upon at the governmental level. Through the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative pre-, present- and post-case study data from a three-year school-based mentoring program in Hong Kong, this paper examines how the effective delivery of the music curriculum in early childhood education can be enhanced by the implementation of mentoring in helping to ensure the long-term professional development of its participants. The findings indicate the inadequate amount of training and preparation for kindergarten teachers in Hong Kong to adequately deliver a multifaceted music curriculum, and the mentor could fulfill the role of a music specialist. As a reference source for those considering the implementation of similar programs within their kindergarten settings, the findings can have applications across different subject areas, providing a practical perspective on the implications for sustained delivery as it pertains to novice and veteran teachers alike. To this end, a number of considerations as they relate to the research objectives – along with practical recommendations for the various stakeholders involved within early childhood education – are also discussed.

Introduction

In Hong Kong, early childhood education is offered to young children aged three to six at either non-profit making or private kindergartens run by voluntary agencies and private enterprises respectively. It is only in the past decade that it has become officially recognized as the initial stage of formal education (Education Commission, 2000). Concerns for high quality early childhood education and the professional development of teachers have since gone hand in hand, with various policies aimed at upgrading the qualifications of kindergarten teachers being introduced (Audit Commission, 2000). However, continuing issues – most notably those of aspects of policy, continuing professional development needs, training, support and resources – have effectively acted as a barrier to consistent delivery, making such a report both necessary and timely. Within this context, the early childhood music curriculum and teachers' attitudes towards music teaching have been affected by the subsequent, “knock-on” effects. In light of the above, this paper describes a three-year school-based mentoring program and discusses how lessons learned from it can provide a basis for exploring ways that benefit both specialist and non-specialist music teachers.

Background

Many of the current quality issues concerning early childhood education date back to the 1970s when, due to an influx of refugees from Mainland China, there was a dramatic increase in kindergarten enrollment (13,000 in 1953 to 198,351 in 1979), together with heavy demand for preschool education and care (Rao & Koong, 2000). An inadequate supply of qualified teachers led to the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) addressing the need to upgrade the training of existing kindergarten teachers in its *White Paper* on “Primary Education and Pre-primary Services” (Hong Kong Government, 1981), the first target – for 45% of present in-service kindergarten teachers to receive twelve weeks of basic early childhood education teacher training in order to become Qualified Assistant Kindergarten Teachers – being set in 1986. However, it was not until *The 1994 Policy Address* that the government's commitment to improving the quality of early childhood education was affirmed: in addition to an allocation of HK\$163 million being set aside for the following four years to provide training to kindergarten teachers, the academic requirements were raised to two passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. Qualified teachers were duly reaffirmed as an essential factor in the delivery of a high-quality education in the *Education*

Commission Report No. 7 (Education Commission, 1997), along with the recommendation of the establishment of the Quality Education Fund. Among various other policies related to early childhood education, those detailed in the Education Commission's reform proposals of 2000 are regarded as being among the most critical. In focusing on the professional competence of educators, a series of initiatives – including the allocation of HK\$51 million for kindergarten-based educational research by 2005, the publication of a new edition of the pre-primary curriculum guide, and a review on pre-primary education initiated in 2006, as well as the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme initiated in 2007 – reflected the government's commitment to enhancing the quality of early childhood education.

At the same time, the professional development of teachers has long been a major concern. In addition to focusing on improving the professional competence of kindergarten educators (including raising the minimum academic entry qualification for kindergarten teachers to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination from the 2001/02 school year along with the ruling, since September 2003, that all such newly appointed teachers be required to possess a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualification or its equivalent), the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications recommended a generic Teacher Competencies Framework in 2003 in order to help individual teachers acquire both the knowledge and the competency to deal with every aspect of children's growth and development. While enhancement of the quality of early childhood education is still hindered in part due to the limited provision of professional training – in 2007-08, the number of intake places provided for kindergarten teacher education stood at 150 Qualified Kindergarten Teachers and 180 Certificate in Early Childhood Education holders in full-time pre-service mode and 245 Certificate in Early Childhood Education and 60 Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) – there is at least an acknowledgement on the part of the government of the importance of a solid foundation in both early childhood education and continuing professional development for all early childhood education teachers.

Early childhood music education in Hong Kong

According to official statistics (Education Bureau, 2009b), there were 889 local kindergartens and 75 non-local kindergartens with a combined total of 137,630 students and 9,866 kindergarten teachers operating in Hong Kong for the school year 2008-09. Nevertheless, despite the fact that 96% of those teachers have received Qualified

Kindergarten Teacher training, there is a wide discrepancy in terms of curriculum, teacher qualifications and quality of education (Curriculum and Development Council (CDC), 2006).

Early childhood education music programs are often criticized by researchers as lacking direction and planning (Scott-Kassner, 1999), while research has shown that early childhood education teachers lack confidence as a result of an absence of both the musical knowledge and skills required (deVries, 2006; Scott-Kassner, 1999). Although part of the problem may be due to the traditional marginalization of music education within the Hong Kong education sector, the situation is no doubt exacerbated by the fact that the curriculum framework as set out in the “Arts” Learning Area of the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum of Hong Kong* (CDC, 2006) is intended to serve as a guide only and not a statutory requirement, thereby resulting in varying quality in terms of the music instruction provided.

There is also the phenomenon gaining ground in Hong Kong of informal music learning taking place outside schools. Developed with the intention of developing children’s musical potential, such music centers typically offer weekly classes for infants, toddlers and young children. However, the fact that without regulatory standards the quality of such informal provision is likewise likely to be variable makes the necessity of ensuring that teachers are able to provide children with developmentally appropriate musical experiences an even more pressing concern.

Whitebook (2003) has concluded that, with regard to the relationship between high level teaching qualifications and quality early childhood education, teacher education at the level of a four-year college degree is the best path towards achieving quality learning outcomes in such programs. Consequently, those kindergarten teachers who are at present only Qualified Assistant Kindergarten Teacher holders, have until the end of the 2011/12 school year to upgrade to the level of the Certificate in Early Childhood Education, while those who already hold the appropriate Qualified Kindergarten Teacher qualification are advised to enhance their professional growth in order to meet the curriculum goals of early childhood education “... to nurture children to attain all-round development ... and to stimulate children’s interest in learning” (CDC 2006, p. 18) through continuous study. Despite these advances, more still needs to be done if early childhood education is to be fully recognized as a fundamental sector of the Hong Kong educational system.

While the current approved certification courses are designed with diverse learning modes in mind (Education Bureau, 2009c), there still exists the need for graduates of both

the Qualified Kindergarten Teacher and Certificate in Early Childhood Education courses to benefit from more training in music knowledge and teaching skills. Most kindergarten teachers with limited musical backgrounds are currently expected to acquire the ability to design a music curriculum and carry out the requisite classroom music activities after having received only 20-25 hours' training on the Qualified Kindergarten Teacher course and after having undertaken a music module within the Certificate in Early Childhood Education program respectively (Chan & Leong, 2007). In addition, there exists a heated debate concerning the relative merits of "specialist" versus "non-specialist" music teachers (Music Council of Australia, 2005), with those in favor of specialist training (Heneghan, 2001; Seddon & Biasutti, 2008) arguing that non-specialists lack the confidence and teaching expertise to competently implement a comprehensive music curriculum. Whatever the respective merits, the reality is that young children's music education in Hong Kong is still mainly delivered by classroom teachers who find it difficult to prepare meaningful instruction (Nardo, Custodero, Persellin, & Fox, 2006).

The case for mentoring

Mentoring has been recognized as an effective form of job-embedded professional development whereby the skill development of mentees is enhanced by experienced practitioners in a personal way (Zepeda, 2009). It can also help mentees to hone their "soft skills" and emotional intelligence in addition to developing their teaching strategies through learning how to learn (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002).

Crucial to the whole process is the use of an in-depth developmental approach, the main benefit of which lies in its function of helping the mentee proceed from one stage to another without suffering from the loss of content frequently encountered in standard professional development courses (Wallace & Gravells, 2007). For teacher education, mentoring is recognized as an effective way to equip teachers with the necessary skills to effectively implement new teaching practices (Weaver, 2004) by providing ongoing on-site support with one-to-one guidance. As a result, mentoring has become particularly popular in early childhood education teacher training for helping unqualified early childhood education teachers develop their professional knowledge, skills and attitude (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008).

Despite this, relatively little research has been carried out concerning mentoring in both teacher education, teacher professional development and kindergartens in Hong Kong (Yip, 2001). Following a successful mentorship scheme initiated by The Hong Kong

Institute of Education in 1998 aimed at training student teachers to become more competent within the classroom (the Institute Preschool Professional Interface), an extension was proposed to include fresh early childhood education graduates (Wong, 2000). It was the creation of this scheme that formed the foundation of the present research study.

Methodology

This study adopts a case study approach to investigate the outcomes of a three-year school-based mentoring program that constituted the professional development of eight early childhood education teachers in a selected Hong Kong kindergarten. Case studies are usually adopted “when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p. 1).

Two research questions guided this case study:

1. What challenges do “non-specialist” early childhood education teachers face when teaching music?
2. What are the positive outcomes of the mentoring program in the professional development of early childhood education teachers?

Case study school and participants

An established, church-affiliated, non-profit making kindergarten in Hong Kong was selected as the case study school, where the researcher was recruited to work in the capacity of arts specialist (“music and art”; hereafter, music) and tasked with the additional responsibility of initiating a three-year school-based Arts Curriculum Development Plan accompanied by a staff mentoring program.

The primary participants (mentees) involved with the program between September 2003 and July 2006 were eight Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, full-time female non-music specialist teachers, all of whom were in possession of the Qualified Assistant Kindergarten Teacher qualification. Based on the starting date of the mentoring program, kindergarten teaching experience ranged from four to fifteen years, with none of the participants having received any formal or instrumental training prior to the commencement of the program.

Structure of the program

The structure of the program was as follows:

Year 1 – The researcher spent two and a half days at the kindergarten per week providing case study participants with models of music teaching (including setting the teaching and learning objectives, implementing the school-based music curriculum, leading the various listening, performing, moving and creating activities, using effective music teaching strategies, applying the music pedagogies into teaching practices and assessing children’s musical outcomes).

Years 2 & 3 – The researcher spent three and a half days at the kindergarten per week to reinforce the training of participants’ music teaching by using a collaborative model and offering further assistance in the areas outlined above.

Data collection

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected via a combination of two surveys (one pre- and the other post-case study), ongoing observations and a post-case study interview, and subsequently analyzed using content analysis and SPSS in order to identify the issues related to early childhood education music teaching and the effectiveness of school-based mentoring. In addition, documentation such as school development plans, archival records of teachers’ professional development history, and artifacts such as project outlines were also assembled throughout the three school years.

The case study data were collected during the implementation of the program over the course of the three-year period; the longitudinal data collection was carried out in three phases spanning six years as described below:

Phase 1 (Pre-Case Study)

Pre-mentoring survey

This consisted of thirteen closed- and open-ended questions and was distributed to the eight case study participants by the researcher in person at the kindergarten. Versions were made available in both English and Chinese. The response rate was 100%. Data from the pre-mentoring survey were collected with the purpose of:

1. Identifying issues related to current early childhood education music instruction and the professional development needs of early childhood education teachers in Hong Kong.
2. Gaining an understanding of music activities within Hong Kong kindergartens.

Findings (Phase 1)

All case study participants considered music education to be important within the sphere of early childhood education, principally for its ability to:

- foster children’s interest in music;
- foster children’s development in all four objectives of the curriculum framework (“Physical Development”, “Cognitive and Language Development”, “Affective and Social Development”, and “Aesthetic Development”) and;
- integrate with other learning areas such as Art, Physical Education, Language, Mathematics, General Knowledge, and Biblical Knowledge.

About half the respondents thought that thematic learning was the most desirable music learning approach, designating the four key teacher roles within the process of children’s music learning as instructor, curriculum implementer, learning partner and motivator. ‘Lack of relevant music knowledge in teaching “Music Appreciation”’ was given as the main obstacle (37.5%) in teaching music, with “A lack of innovative teaching”, “A lack of music games for teaching music elements”, and “Inadequate time for preparing teaching materials” each receiving 12.5%.

The conclusions drawn suggest that the participants required further training in music skills and pedagogies in order to allow them to meet their teaching needs and thus fulfill their roles as instructors, curriculum implementers, learning partners, motivators and supporters of the student-centered learning process.

Phase 2 (During the Case Study)

Information collected mainly from sustained classroom observations (carried out both as non-participant researcher and participant-as-researcher) of daily music teaching and learning was used for:

1. Examining the information collected in Phase 1.
2. Understanding the mentoring process.
3. Investigating the effectiveness of the mentoring approach in order to enhance music education in the kindergarten case study.

Findings (Phase 2)

(a) Non-participant researcher observations

The researcher as non-participant observer recorded teachers' classroom performance in a classroom observation checklist where participants' performance was rated on a three-level scale (Low, Medium, High) using twelve teaching criteria.

(b) Researcher-as-participant observations

Throughout the three school years, case study participants were given weekly researcher-as-participant observations with the formative purpose of facilitating professional growth and increasing music teaching effectiveness. All observed events and interactions in the classroom observations were detailed as "field notes" and then summarized in an annual report review of the arts curriculum at the end of each of the three school years. The findings demonstrated an increase in strength in both participants' music teaching (particularly their engagement) and their further music training, combined with students' happier participation in the music activities by the end of the program.

As with the non-participant researcher observation, each participant was rated on a three-level scale. There was a significant increase noted in music teaching performance following the implementation of one additional mentoring day per week in the second and third years of the program, as Table 1 shows:

Table 1. Individual Participant's Performance Level in Classroom Observations

<i>Case Participant</i>	<i>Non-Participant Observation</i>	<i>Researcher-Participant Observations</i>		
	End of 1st Year	1st Year Modeling as focus	2nd Year Mentoring as focus	3rd Year Mentoring as focus
Kitty	L	L	M	M+
Peggy	L	L+	M+	M++
Alice	L+	M	M+	H
Sammi	L	L	M	M+
Kelly	L	L	L+	--
Yanly	L	L	L++	--
Elaine	L	--	--	L+
Wendy	L	--	--	--
Joyce	--	--	--	H

H: High Level M: Medium Level L: Low Level

Phase 3 (Post-Case Study)

Information collected from the post-mentoring interview was examined in order to:

1. Understand the experiences and challenges of individual mentees in the school-based mentoring program implemented in the kindergarten case study.
2. Determine the effectiveness of the mentoring approach to enhancing music education in the kindergarten case study.
3. Understand the existing provision of professional development for early childhood education teachers in Hong Kong.

Findings (Phase 3)***(a) Post-mentoring interview***

The standardized, open-ended interview was conducted three years after the completion of the school-based mentoring program, in June and July 2009, with the intention of determining the sustained effectiveness of a mentoring approach to early childhood education music teaching. Two pilot interviews were undertaken prior to the formal interviews with two non-participants who were also kindergarten teachers. Lasting 20-30 minutes, the individual interviews with the seven case study participants enabled in-depth information to be collected about interviewees' past experiences as mentees of the

school-based mentoring program at the kindergarten, their desired music teacher training, and their recommendations for music mentors working with early childhood education teachers.

During the post-mentoring interview, Joyce (one of the mentees) made the case for music specialists to support regular kindergarten teachers by citing “their [teachers’] diverse music backgrounds”, qualifying this by stating that, unless they were employed full-time – “ ... they could not provide teachers with relevant music teaching experience and continuous support.”

Discussion

Key Issues

The key issues relating to mentoring and professional development in early childhood education were compiled into five themes (“Continuing Professional Development Needs”, “Challenges and Teaching Strategies in Music Teaching”, “Facilitation of School Development”, “Teaching Confidence” and “Effectiveness and Outcomes of the Mentoring Experience”) before subsequently being matched with the two research questions. Various aspects pertaining to issues and effectiveness were then compared across each of the research methods, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Comparison of Data Collected from Multiple Research Methods

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Research Method</i>	<i>Literature Review</i>	<i>Pre-mentoring Survey</i>	<i>Mentor’s Observation</i>	<i>Post-mentoring Interview</i>
<i>Policy</i>					
A relatively low entry (academic & professional) requirement and limited provision of professional training		✓	—	—	—
A controversial Pre-primary Voucher Scheme (PEVS)		✓	—	—	—
<i>Continuing PD Needs</i>					
An unspecific and rather complicated Teacher Competence Framework (TCF) for identifying PD needs		✓	—	—	—
CPD needs to develop both musical and pedagogical knowledge & skills for supporting the daily music teaching of EC teachers		—	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 (continued)

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Research Method</i>	<i>Literature Review</i>	<i>Pre-mentoring Survey</i>	<i>Mentor's Observation</i>	<i>Post-mentoring Interview</i>
<i>Training & Pedagogy</i>					
A lack of music learning background & instrumental training; and inadequate mastery of knowledge & skills (Musical & Pedagogical)		✓	—	✓	✓
A limited provision of music training & in-depth music pedagogies, and a lack of ongoing music training provided in the EC teacher education programs		✓	—	✓	✓
<i>EC Music Curriculum</i>					
A lack of diversity and learning progress in the music curriculum, an alignment between curriculum and learning objectives, as well as planned music lessons.		✓	—	✓	✓
Marginalization of music in school curriculum		✓	—	—	✓
<i>Support & Resources</i>					
An unequal allocation of Government expenditure on education		✓	—	—	—
A lack of continuous school support, including music teaching resources & training, time for preparing teaching materials, and clear administrative arrangement		—	✓	—	✓
<i>Teachers' Attitudes towards Music Teaching</i>					
The effectiveness of mentees' training, teaching, and students' music learning outcomes were positively affected by teachers' enthusiasm for music teaching		—	—	✓	✓
<i>Effective Outcomes</i>					
An effective music teaching which could arouse students' interest in music learning, nurture students' love of music, and ultimately children's music learning was enhanced.		—	—	✓	✓
Various positive changes were brought to mentees' daily music teaching practices, such as an enhanced confidence in music teaching		—	—	✓	✓
Teachers were able to adopt a student-centered approach and stress on nurturing children's development in imagination and creativity by means of integrated arts learning; while children are also able to engage in such activities and their ability of appreciation was fostered.		—	—	✓	✓

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of mentoring as a long-term process in enhancing non-specialist teachers' music teaching and, ultimately, children's music learning in the Hong Kong context. Job-embedded professional development training is also considered to be effective for enhancing early childhood education music teaching.

Theme 1: Continuing Professional Development Needs

Asked to share their thoughts on further music teacher training, the majority of the case study participants listed music knowledge and skills, music theory, and Orff pedagogy – as well as instrumental and vocal training – as the specific kinds of instruction they wished to receive.

In clarifying the position concerning the direction of early childhood education, the reform proposals put forward as part of the document published by the Education Commission (2000) reinforce an ongoing desire on the part of the government to ensure the need for high quality delivery. Moreover, in identifying such frontline education workers as the key players in implementing education reform, the proposals recognize the importance of targeting teachers' ongoing professional development. Two of the ways this has been visualized are firstly by the specific policy requirement – to be achieved initially through a number of one-year full-time pre-service early childhood education courses to provide 200 and 440 training places in the 2000/01 and 2001/02 school years respectively – that every kindergarten teacher should obtain the qualified kindergarten teacher qualifications by the 2003/04 school year and, secondly, that in order to enable qualified kindergarten teachers to further their studies, different early childhood teacher education providers offer Certificate in Education (Kindergarten) training places. While all this is undoubtedly to be welcomed, it is estimated that only about half of the kindergarten teachers had completed the Certificate in Early Childhood Education. A different situation concerns the Teacher Competencies Framework, developed by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (2003), perceived by many practitioners as being too generic to allow for the addressing of specific individual professional development competencies. This is especially true when viewed in the light of the numerous changes that (early childhood) education is continually undergoing via a variety of different factors. Further complicating the issue are the copious standards descriptions given within the same document, which not only have the potential to dissuade teachers (Maloney & Barblett, 2003), but also imply a set of competencies to be achieved as opposed to guideposts for encouraging personal growth and career development of all teachers (Day, 1999). Taking the wider and

longer-term view, it would be heartening to see a greater emphasis placed on the mentoring process as an approach that uniquely demonstrates – as the pages of this report are at pains to point out – the effectiveness of meeting the needs of both teachers and children.

Theme 2: Challenges and teaching strategies in music teaching

Responses from the case studies revealed that teachers had learned certain effective music teaching strategies from the school-based mentoring that could provide their children with more meaningful and interesting music education through project-based activities and thematic approaches to integrate the different learning contents. In this regard, Joyce's summary of the benefits of mentoring provides an accurate representation of all the participants' views:

I have learned to set clear short-term and long-term teaching objectives ... design a diverse and systematic curriculum ... enhance children's music learning progressively by means of a three-year systematic and developmentally appropriate music learning scheduled progress, integrate the use of various contemporary music pedagogies, diverse teaching contents and resources ... as well as enhancing teaching planning and practice accompanied by continuous review." [Joyce]

However, mentees still felt they lacked adequate resources and ongoing support from the school in order to implement them. Project-based activities and thematic approaches to integrating the different learning content areas were identified as the main strategies learned for providing children with more meaningful and interesting music education. The experience of the case study participants revealed that despite music training being identified as a key issue in Hong Kong early childhood education, within current teacher training programs at least this was inadequate in the areas of the music pedagogy component – hence the need for mentoring.

Theme 3: Facilitation of school development

Continuous school-based mentoring was felt by the participating teachers not only to have provided them with a richer set of resources, but also to have helped facilitate development within the school. Such development can and should, it was emphasized, extend to curriculum and learning objectives, diversity and learning progress within the present early childhood education music curriculum, as well as planned music lessons. One of the factors presently inhibiting this was the perceived marginalization of music, suggesting that apart from a statutory early childhood education curriculum that values equally each learning

area, adequate training for designing a quality music curriculum is an indispensable requirement.

Theme 4: Teaching confidence

The case study responses indicated that mentoring not only helped increase non-specialist teachers' confidence in music teaching by means of various strategies and support, but also enabled them to become aware of their own weaknesses in music teaching.

Despite the dramatic increase of funding for pre-primary education outlined earlier, early childhood education has received an allocation of just 13.0-14.6% of the total yearly expenditure (compared to 21.5-23.0% for Primary, 35.3-38.2% for Secondary, and 25.7-28.7% for Higher education) over the course of the past six years (Education Bureau, 2009a). Such limited funding within the early childhood education sector has consequently left many such instructors with, at best, discontinuous professional development training, resources and time for preparing music classes. In addition, an apparent lack of increase for training places within the intake provision for early childhood teacher education from the 2004/05 to 2007/08 school years has led to only 37.3% of kindergarten teachers becoming Certificate in Early Childhood Education holders (The Budget, 2009), thereby falling somewhat short of the 2008/09 revised estimate and 2009/10 estimate of 48.5% and 59.0% respectively.

Theme 5: Effectiveness and outcomes of the mentoring experience

Mentoring has been shown to be effective in enabling participants to gain the confidence and skills for their daily teaching by means of various strategies and support, thereby bringing about positive changes in their practices, arousing their students' interest, nurturing a love of the subject and ultimately enhancing their children's learning. Teacher enthusiasm is fundamental to effective communication and a pedagogical necessity widely recognized as a component of effective teaching quality which in turn is capable of making a great impact on various learning outcomes in all disciplines and at different grade levels from kindergarten to college (Tauber & Mester, 2007).

Within music education, teachers' enthusiasm for music teaching can positively affect the effectiveness of mentees' training and teaching as well as students' music learning outcomes. The case study participants' responses reinforced these findings, revealing a very positive reaction to the overall mentoring experience, especially in such areas as enriching music knowledge and music teaching experiences, as well as teaching

content, elements and resources. Here, the responses revealed that despite their limited backgrounds in music education, the mentoring had helped enhance the effectiveness of all participants by allowing them to learn and gain the confidence and skills necessary for their daily music teaching. Moreover, the benefits continued to be evident three years after completion of the program.

Conclusions

This longitudinal case study has identified important issues in five areas associated with the implementation of a school-based mentoring approach for enhancing early childhood education music instruction. In this way, the effectiveness of long-term professional development in enhancing both music teaching and learning has been more clearly determined.

Three main points have emerged from the study. The first is that mentoring and professional development are not unrelated concepts. In fact, mentoring can be considered a form of professional development, and the findings indicate that a school-based mentoring approach can be highly effective in enabling teachers to gain the necessary confidence and skills to equip them in their daily (music) teaching, despite perhaps having a limited background in a particular subject area. Additionally, such benefits can continue to be evident in the participants' (music) teaching practices within their respective kindergartens long after the completion of the mentoring program.

The second point is the acknowledgement that while the policies initiated via the Education Commission's reform proposals ten years ago *are* having an impact, with some notably positive effects being experienced by the practitioners of early childhood education, it is equally true to say that there is currently little real support for the mentoring process given at an official level. The findings from this research study – essentially those outlined above concerning the effectiveness of school-based mentoring in enabling teachers to gain the necessary confidence and skills for their daily music teaching needs, along with the evidence of residual benefits up to three years later – suggest that this is an area deserving considerably more consideration by policy makers. In so doing, there is also the potential for the tertiary sector, by working more closely with schools, to benefit through the creation of a stronger synergy between the two sectors.

The third is that there is clearly a niche for the role of the music specialist, ostensibly to support traditional kindergarten teachers' music teaching. As mentioned before, current graduates of both the Qualified Kindergarten Teacher and Certificate in

Early Childhood Education courses are required (despite frequently limited musical backgrounds) to be able to both design a music curriculum and carry out classroom music activities after having received 20-25 hours' training on the former or having undertaken a music module on the latter. Despite a desire expressed on the part of the participants, an estimate puts at less than 10% the number of kindergartens in Hong Kong that currently have a supporting music specialist.

To summarize, then, it is hoped that the findings of this study will prompt all those concerned with the promotion and delivery of early childhood education to value mentoring as a powerful motivational tool as part of a teacher's individual professional development. Viewed in this light, there is the very real opportunity for the findings presented here to be regarded as something of a "pilot case" for other subjects. While more research undoubtedly needs to be done, the five areas considered to be crucial for the successful implementation of mentoring to be undertaken, irrespective of the particular subject area, are: (1) to clarify the program goals and make them explicit to all participants; (2) to ensure ongoing school support and commitment; (3) to offer adequate opportunities and time for teacher reflection; (3) to encourage continual communication between mentor and mentees; and (4) to provide ongoing constructive feedback.

Done properly, mentoring clearly offers benefits not only to the mentees and their students, but also translates into a wealth of gained experience on the part of the mentor. All this can only serve to enhance and thus moving forward early childhood education (music) teaching and learning.

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