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Exposing young children to music through the production and presentation of music-appreciation television programs

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University of South Australia

This paper reports on a research study of the effectiveness of a series of music-appreciation activities for young children in Hong Kong. These activities were designed using world music and were presented as part of a local early childhood television program for community interest. One-hundred-and-sixty-eight local preschool children (mean age 4.25) and their classroom teachers, from 16 childcare centres or kindergartens, participated in this study. Qualitative data was collected using individual structured interviews with both children and teachers. The data showed that these music-appreciation activities enriched children’s musical experiences and teachers’ musical repertoires in early childhood settings. Teachers also showed positive preferences to learn the activities using multimedia tools. Implications for the curriculum planning and teacher training of early childhood music education are discussed.

Introduction

Music Appreciation for young children has been a long-standing topic in research on early childhood education. Researchers have revealed the positive impacts of music-appreciation activities on child development. These include increased cognitive skills (Cnossen, Wilson & Prior, 2006), improved self-esteem (Ward, 1999), improved physical coordination (Hirt-Mannheimer, 1995) and wider aesthetics responses (Yim, 2005). Researchers have also proposed pedagogies for conducting music appreciation activities with young children; for example, the use of recorded music (Jalongo, 1996), and repeated listening to enhance familiarity and responsiveness (Levin, Pergas & Austin, 2005). Some researchers also emphasized the importance of music appreciation for young children by arguing that human beings, from infancy, possibly possess an innate ability to appreciate music and/or other aesthetic subjects (Dalla Bella, Perets & Rousseau, 2001; Lawler, 2005; Trehub, Schellenberg & Kamensky, 1998).

Although these research studies and arguments may have provided sufficient rationale for conducting music appreciation activities with young children, most of them are based on data from Western societies. There appears to be a lack of studies exploring teaching and learning issues surrounding music appreciation for young children in an Eastern context.

This study set out to explore the effectiveness of a method of presenting a series of music appreciation activities for children in Hong Kong. Such information, if available, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of early childhood music education.

In Hong Kong, music appreciation has long been included as one of the learning areas in the local early childhood curriculum. In the Guide to the pre-primary curriculum (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 1996, pp. 88 & 91), teachers are encouraged to enhance children’s ability to appreciate music by arranging music appreciation sessions during music lessons and/or at other activity times. In a new curriculum, to be implemented in 2007, teachers are still encouraged to teach children to appreciate the beauty of nature and works of art and to provide opportunities for them to appreciate diversified arts so as to broaden their knowledge of art and cultivate their appreciation ability (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2006, pp. 35-36). In addition, both versions of the local curriculum (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Institute, 1996) and another government publication, Performance indicators (Hong Kong Educational and Manpower Bureau, 2003, p. 13), have emphasized the need to encourage children to appreciate the arts of different cultures and forms.
The above curricula provide basic directions for music-appreciation teaching for local early childhood educators. Also, they confirm the perceived importance of including music appreciation in the curriculum for young children. However, the use of music from diversified cultures and forms may not yet be a common practice in the early childhood music contexts in Hong Kong. There seems to be a gap between teachers' understanding of these theoretical principles and their possible practical implementations in the local context.

In an attempt to build upon the theoretical principles and the findings of Western research on early childhood music education, this study explored to what extent young children in Hong Kong benefited from a series of 15 music-appreciation activities which were a synthesis of three major approaches: world music, Orff Schulwerk, and multimedia.

1) World music

World music is "used broadly to encompass styles ranging from traditional music to globally marketed dance music with a traditional flair" (Hart, 2003, p. 693). Sixteen world music excerpts were chosen in this study according to the different themes of each program (see Table 1). The themes were selected by producers of a local early childhood television program from Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), entitled Pre-school Learn to fly III. This program was broadcast weekly on a local free television channel and also uploaded onto its official website (www.rthk.org.hk) for community access. This series of music-appreciation activities was filmed as segments of each program.

2) Orff Schulwerk

One of the major objectives of this music educational approach (Wheeler & Rebecke, 1985, p. 11) was "to give an immediacy of enjoyment and meaning to the child through active participation in all experiences." Such participation provided for elements of responsive body movement, imitation and improvisation (Shinrock, 1997). Indeed, enjoyment and active participation are essential to learning, especially in early childhood (Morinwck, 2000; Ridley, McWilliam, Raspa & de Kruif, 2001). These two esssentials were also emphasised in the local curriculum guidelines in the arts domain (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p. 63, Hong Kong Curriculum Development Institute, 1998, pp. 87-98, 94-95).

3) Multimedia

Multimedia can be described as "the use of multiple forms of media in a presentation" (Schwartz & Bichner, 1993, p. 8). Music excerpts for the activities in this study were recorded on mini discs (MDs) and on CD-R (WAV files) for teacher participants. Players for these two audio formats were accessible at all participants' workplaces. As well, the researcher provided teachers with video home system (VHS) tapes and VCD (WMV files), with

<table>
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<th>Original Language</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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suggested physical movements and narration for each musical excerpt according to the melodic contour and rhythmic patterns.

The research study

This study was devised to assess the effectiveness of a series of 16 music appreciation activities for young children in local pre-school settings in early 2005. Three major questions were applied:

1) What were children's views of this series of music-appreciation activities?
2) What were teachers' views of learning a music-appreciation activity by using multimedia tools?
3) What, if any, were the possible benefits and challenges to early childhood teachers when implementing this series of music-appreciation activities in the local teaching context?

It was hoped that the results of this study would serve as a reference for subsequent curriculum planning and teacher education.

Sample

Participants were 168 children (73 males and 95 females) and their classroom teachers in 16 childcare centres or kindergartens in Hong Kong. The mean age of children was 4.25, with 44 children aged three years, 64 children aged four years, and 60 children aged five years. Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), childcare centres and kindergartens that conduct group music-appreciation activities were invited to participate. Approximately 10 children in each childcare centre and kindergarten were chosen by basic random sampling (Lewin, 2005). Children who had consent forms from their parents were assigned a number for sampling purposes. Classroom teachers were then assigned numbers using a table of random numbers (McMurray, Pace & Scott, 2004). All teacher-participants were qualified early childhood educators who possessed a minimum of Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) qualification or its equivalent (see www.edb.gov.hk).

Method

Each of the 16 music-appreciation activities was assigned to a childcare centre or kindergarten, according to the filming schedule arranged by the centre and television program producers. A music MD, a CD-R, a VHS tape and a VCD were given to the classroom teacher approximately three weeks before the visit from the researcher and the filming team. Teachers were asked to become familiar with the music and movements, using these audio and visual resources, before presenting the activities to the children, using physical movement, simple narrations and the NJDs or CD-R only. It was recommended that teachers include the assigned music-appreciation activities lessons as a segment (maximum of five minutes) in their normal daily music lesson approximately one week before the visit from the researcher and the filming team. Teachers and children were also encouraged to match their physical improvisations to the music.

Qualitative data was collected at the end of the filming process through individual structured interviews (McMurray et al., 2004) with children and their classroom teachers. Interviews were conducted face to face, in Cantonese (a major dialect of the southern part of mainland China). Notes were taken during the interviews and the data obtained was classified anonymously.

The children were asked two questions. The first concerned their preferences for the music-appreciation activity by providing a 'yes' or 'no' response. The second was an open-ended, follow-up question where children disclosed what they liked or disliked. Children who were unwilling to respond verbally could choose to point to a picture with symbols of 'tick' and 'cross'.

The teachers were also asked two questions. The first, which was scored on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly dislike) to 4 (strongly like), concerned their preferences for learning a new music-appreciation activity through the use of multimedia tools. The second was open-ended and sought their views of the benefits and challenges, if any, of implementing the music-appreciation activities in their teaching contexts.

Results

Responses to question 1: Children's preferences and views of the music-appreciation activities

An initial analysis showed that 88 per cent of children liked the music-appreciation activities. Children commented positively on the activities that allowed them to respond physically to music. Children's negative comments were generally related to the physical settings of the activity (see Table 2).

A 2 (yes/no) x 2 (gendar) Chi-square analysis showed that there was a non-significant relationship ($\chi^2=.01$, df=1, $p=.90$) between children's response patterns and their gender. Such a finding implies that a child's gender does not have a relationship with children's preferences of the music-appreciation activities. A 2 (yes/no) x 3 (children's age: 3, 4 and 5 years) Chi-square analysis showed that there was a significant relationship ($\chi^2=6.53$, df=2, $p=.04$) between children's response patterns and their age. Specifically, 90 per cent of children showed preferences for the music-appreciation activities, with children aged four years scoring the highest percentage (39%) and children aged three years scoring the lowest percentage (23%).
Table 2: Children’s comments on the music-appreciation activities

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<tr>
<th>Benefit Requested</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
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<td>Enjoyment</td>
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<td>Knowledge</td>
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<td>Social</td>
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<td>Entertainment</td>
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<td>Relaxation</td>
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<td>Learning</td>
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Responses to question 3: ‘Teachers’ views of benefits and challenges of the implementation of the music-appreciation activities

All teacher-participants agreed that the activities had a positive impact on the variety of repertoire and the enjoyment of their music classes. Of the 16 teachers, 11 reported the unexpected positive and joyful responses from children to the new music genre. However, 12 teachers mentioned their lack of confidence in conducting similar activities in the future as one of their possible challenges. Ten teachers were concerned about the inadequate resources in their local context. Examples of teachers’ views of benefits and challenges are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers’ views of benefits and challenges

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<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
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Discussion

The major aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a series of music-appreciation activities presented in the local context. First, the findings showed that the majority of children had positive preferences for and views about these activities. The children especially liked the opportunities to move along with the music the activities provided. This finding concurs with other

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early childhood research, such as that conducted by Lay-Dobyra and Dobyra (1993), van der Linde (1999) and Russell-Bowie (2005). Moreover, children aged four years and above in the present study showed a higher percentage of preference for the musical activities. This finding may imply that the activities presented were more appropriate for the older children in the group. In this research, however, the children's 'dislikes' pointed to some possible constraints in the local teaching context, including the limited space and the subject-oriented timetable. Teachers might therefore consider focusing on aspects of how experiences are organised and managed. The arrangement of music activities in the outdoor environment, for example, and a balance between spontaneous and planned music activities can be two possible recommendations for further consideration and research.

Second, the findings showed that all teachers in this study indicated positive views and preferences for the use of multimedia tools in learning a new music-appreciation activity. They mainly appreciated the accessibility, efficiency and mobility of these tools. This finding is consistent with Holden and Button's research (2006, p. 32) which found that teachers generally preferred 'simple schemes of teaching packs with learning outcomes for each year group ... schemes that were teacher and child-friendly, and that provided time-saving activities'. In addition, teachers' comments further emphasised the benefit of multimedia tools where learners were able to learn more deeply from words and pictures than from words alone (Mayer, 2005, p. 8). Nevertheless, further research that is sufficiently sensitive to learners' sociocultural environments and levels of confidence may be needed in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of local teachers' needs and competencies when using multimedia tools in early childhood music education.

Last, all teacher-participants indicated that one of the major benefits of this series of music appreciation activities was to increase the variety of music in the classroom. This finding is an echo of Woody and Burns's (2001) argument that one of the recognised goals of music education is to expose children to styles of music that they might not hear through their involvement in daily popular culture. In addition, surprisingly, teachers identified that most children had positive responses to and preferences for world music—a genre new to both teachers and children. Children's unanticipated responses may imply that the curriculum music repertoire for learning activities would need to be widened, and teachers would need to have a better understanding of young children's musical needs and preferences. Indeed, an increase in the quantity and quality of positive exposure to a musical experience is important because Carper's (2000) research found that using repeated exposure combined with instructional activities enriched preschoolers' and kindergartners' preferred musical styles. However, teachers in this study also pointed out some possible limitations that may restrict them from conducting similar activities in the future, such as their lack of confidence and the difficulties in locating relevant teaching resources. Similar findings have also been revealed in Western classrooms (see Hennessy, Rolfe & Chedzoy, 2001; Holden et al., 2006; Russell-Bowie & Dowson, 2005).

Some further research on the possibilities of providing relevant musical training and resources may encourage teachers to attempt music-appreciation activities incorporating a wider diversity of musical genres.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this research suggest that both teachers and children had positive views about this series of music appreciation activities. Teachers indicated positive preferences for the use of multimedia tools and were able to identify some possible benefits and challenges when implementing these activities. The findings may further enrich the literature related to young children's early music-appreciation experiences and their musical needs. Nevertheless, further research on the development of culturally diversified music appreciation resources and the curriculum of teachers' musical training is recommended. Helping children to understand and appreciate the music of the world's cultures may still be a long-term goal in music education (Mckoy, 2003); but it is undeniably important, as music may enhance not only one's musical and aesthetic potential but may also positively affect one's holistic development.

**References**


