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Background

Professional development has been widely recognised as one of the significant elements in the effective implementation of quality curricula in early childhood education (e.g. Clark & Huber, 2005; David, 2004; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2007; Lobman, Ryan, McLaughlin, & Ackerman, 2004; NAEYC, 2003). Professional development can be defined as ‘the individual’s ability to conceptualize and carry out activities which further personal growth in teaching’ (McAlpine & Harris, 2002, p. 9). It can also be viewed as one’s ‘changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes for the improvement of professional practice’ (San, 1999, p. 20). Contemporary researchers remind us that professional development can be conducted in various forms (e.g. attending a workshop, seminar, and/or conference, and reading professional literature), but researchers consistently emphasise that effective professional development should be teacher-centred, ongoing, and able to foster collegiality, collaborative inquiry and critical discourse (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Nieto, 2003a, 2003b).

In this era of accountability, policy-makers view professional development as the key to increasing teacher quality and improving student learning (Barrett, 2006, p. 6). Within the early childhood education field, in both Eastern and Western contexts, professional development has been emphasised in different government documents. In the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), for example, the local early childhood curriculum guidelines state that teachers should ‘attach importance to professional development through continuous study, and strengthen their communication and co-operation with other teachers and fellow educators. This will help promote effective co-ordination within a pre-primary institution and foster the achievement of the aims of early childhood education’ (Education and Manpower Bureau HKSAR, 2006, p. 46). Additionally, under the recent Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme in HKSAR (Education Bureau, 2008b; Student Financial Assistance Agency, 2008), local eligible non-profit-making early childhood centres are given a grant known as Teacher Development Subsidy (TDS) from the 2007/2008 to 2010/2011 academic years so as to support teachers’ professional development (Education Bureau, 2008a, p. 1). In South Australia there is also a section named Professional Development in its local curriculum guidelines, South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework which aims at supporting leaders and educators to...
implement the curriculum effectively (DETE, 2001). More recently the development and implementation of the National early childhood curriculum—Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009)—has created a new demand for professional development. This is part of the Australian Government’s reform agenda for early childhood education, bringing with it specific needs for professional development (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

Music is well-recognised as one of the essential elements in young children’s development. In the formal educational system of most modernised countries (such as HKSAR, Australia, UK and Singapore) music is included in the early childhood curriculum guidelines as one of the fundamental learning experiences. Academics have also consistently emphasised the positive impact of music on young children’s holistic development, including social-emotional wellbeing (e.g. Baker & Mackinlay, 2006; Young, Street, & Davies, 2007), neurological development (e.g. Balaban, Anderson, & Wisniewski, 1998; Ho, Cheung, & Chan, 2003), and enjoyment of music (e.g. de Vries, 2004, 2007). Hence, early childhood teachers are generally expected to integrate music into their programs to enhance children’s holistic development.

Specifically, from the viewpoint of music education, the importance of professional development has also had a longstanding emphasis within the profession (e.g. Bowles, 2003; Conway, Hibbard, Albert, & Hourigan, 2005; Walls, 2008; Wonkling & Henry, 1999). An early but important report of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) Task Force on Music Teacher Education for the 1990s (Olson, 1987) devoted a chapter on planning for career growth which characterised professional development as a lifelong process for both pre-service and in-service teachers within the music context. The report highlighted self-growth by portraying teachers as individuals who seek change and advancement, rather than merely fulfilling requirements for renewal of their teaching licences. More recently, Barrett (2006) stressed the important role of professional development in music education, especially as part of the current educational reform.

However, most available literature on teachers’ professional development in music has been conducted in the Western context (e.g. Bauer, Reese, & McAllister, 2003; Kerchner & Abril, 2009; Koutsoupidou, 2010). There seems to be very few research studies done in the Eastern context or from a cross-cultural point of view. In addition, most available literature on professional development in music teaching is not centred on the early childhood context (e.g. Bauer, 2007; Bowles, 2003; Conway, Hibbard, & Hourigan, 2005). Indeed, Gruenhagen (2007, p. vi) confirmed that research on the professional development of music educators in the early childhood context is ‘almost non-existent’.

In addition, research by Ebbeck and McDowall (2003) stated that early childhood programs in South Australia had limited focus on teaching the arts and that there had been a reduction in arts components, including music, while there had been an increase in the mathematics and science components. A similar situation can also be found in the HKSAR context (Chan & Leong, 2006). This has created limited levels of confidence in music teaching in both the East and the West (Ebbeck & Yim, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2001). Hence professional development for teachers can be a way for them to increase their music education understanding.

This study used a cross-cultural approach to broaden our understanding of early childhood teachers’ professional development in music in both the East and the West. Such a study could also deepen understanding of cultural traditions, adding new insights for the early childhood music field.

A research study

This study was designed to examine and compare early childhood teachers’ views and involvement in professional development in music in the HKSAR and South Australia. The two research questions were:

1. What are early childhood teachers’ levels of involvement in professional development in music in HKSAR and South Australia?
2. Are there any relationships between early childhood teachers’ levels of involvement in professional development in music and their cultural contexts?

Sample

Participants in the research were 62 generalist early childhood teachers in seven childcare centres in HKSAR and South Australia. These participants were not music specialists. The average class size in HKSAR was 30, with children aged 3–5 years. The teacher–child ratio was 1:15. The average class size in South Australia was 20, with children aged 3–5 years, and a staff–child ratio of 1:10. Teacher-participants were distributed with 38 teachers from three childcare centres in HKSAR and 24 teachers from four childcare centres in South Australia. Teacher-participants were selected by convenience sampling (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006; Kumar, 2011). All teacher-participants had experience in conducting and/or supporting group musical activities with children in their centres. All centres were community-based in the metropolitan areas and were selected for the purpose of minimising any possible organisational and geographic
impact within each cultural context. In addition, the agreement of these teacher-participants and their centres to participate voluntarily in the research also contributed to the sample selection.

**Method**

The overall study used a mixed mode research approach but this paper reports on the quantitative data only (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003). A research instrument named the Teachers’ Music Development Scale (TMDS) was devised by the first researcher to collect quantitative data. The 6-item scale is intended to measure teachers’ involvement in professional music development. The six items are:

i. Attending music-related workshop(s)/seminar(s)/conference(s)
ii. Reading music-related book(s)/article(s)/website(s)
iii. Watching music-related video(s)/TV program(s)
iv. Discussing music-related topic(s) with colleague(s) or friend(s)
v. Practising music performance skill(s)
vi. Collecting music-related teaching material(s).

The statement on TMDS is ‘Please indicate below any participation in the following activities in the past year’. Teacher-participants expressed their involvement in professional music development on a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always). TMDS was translated into the Chinese language from its initial English version for teachers in HKSAR by using a blind-back-translation strategy (Bracken & Barona, 1991). The average percentage of match between the two versions of TMDS was 94 per cent, which is considered acceptable (Brislin, 1980). The scale was also pilot-tested on five teachers, using convenience sampling in each cultural context, resulting in no amendment.

Within the current data set, an explanatory factor analysis based on data from 62 teachers from both HKSAR and South Australia samples retained one factor solution that explained 36.8 per cent of the total variance extracted. Table 1 represents the factor loadings of this analysis.

The reliability of TMDS using Cronbach \( \alpha \) was 0.60 for HKSAR and 0.68 for South Australia. The overall reliability for both HKSAR and South Australian samples (\( n = 62 \)) using Cronbach \( \alpha \) was 0.65. Such reliability levels were just below optimal, but were still deemed to be acceptable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/statement</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Collecting music-related teaching material(s)</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Reading music-related book(s)/article(s)/website(s)</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Watching music-related video(s)/TV program(s)</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Discussing music-related topic(s) with colleague or friend(s)</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Practising music performance skill(s)</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Attending music-related workshop(s)/conference(s)</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigen value 2.21

Note: \( n = 62 \)

**Results**

Figure 1 shows that teachers in South Australia tended to have higher levels of engagement in five of the six types of professional development in music than teachers in HKSAR. From the study, the most popular type of professional development in music among teacher-participants in HKSAR was ‘Reading books/articles/websites’. In South Australia, ‘watching videos/TV programs’ was the most popular type. Coincidently, in both HKSAR and South Australia, ‘attending music-related workshops/seminars/conferences’ was the least popular professional development type, although it is usually recognised as the most common mode of professional development.

Figure 1. HKSAR and South Australian teachers’ engagement in professional development in music
One-way ANOVA analysis (Table 2) further showed that significant differences were found in three types of professional development between the two cultural contexts: (1) Watching music-related video(s)/TV program(s); (2) Discussing music-related topic(s) with colleague(s) or friend(s); (3) Practising music performance skill(s). Such findings imply relationships between teachers’ cultural contexts and their involvement in professional music development.

Figure 2 further indicated that teachers in South Australia had a higher overall level of involvement in professional development in music than teachers in HKSAR. An independent sample T-test analysis showed that such a difference was significant, $F(1, 60) = .12, p > 0.01, d = −0.80$, between teachers in HKSAR ($n = 38, M = 11.58, SD = 2.23$) and teachers in South Australia ($n = 24, M = 13.67, SD = 2.94$). This finding implies a relationship between teachers’ cultural contexts and their overall involvement in professional music development.

### Table 2. Mean differences between HKSAR and South Australian teachers’ engagement in professional development in music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables/statistic</th>
<th>Cultural contexts</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$F(1, 60)$</th>
<th>$d$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending music-related workshop(s)/seminar(s)/conference(s)</td>
<td>HKSAR South Australia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading music-related book(s)/article(s)/website(s)</td>
<td>HKSAR South Australia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>−0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching music-related video(s)/TV program(s)</td>
<td>HKSAR South Australia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>17.67*</td>
<td>−1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing music-related topic(s) with colleague(s) or friend(s)</td>
<td>HKSAR South Australia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>21.72*</td>
<td>−1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practising/acquiring music performance skill(s)</td>
<td>HKSAR South Australia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>5.78*</td>
<td>−0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting music-related teaching material(s)</td>
<td>HKSAR South Australia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>−0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $n = 62, *p < 0.05. df = (1, 60).$ All means were expressed out of 4. $d$ represents Cohen's effect size (Cohen, 1960).
Discussion and implications

Results showed that ‘reading books/articles/websites’ was the most popular type of professional development in music among teacher-participants in HKSAR. In South Australia, ‘watching videos/TV programs’ was the most popular type. Among the six types of professional development in music as indicated in TMDS, significant findings were found in three professional development activities in music between the two cultural contexts: 1) Watching music-related video(s)/TV program(s); 2) Discussing music-related topic(s) with colleague(s) or friend(s); and 3) Practising music performance skills.

Reading music-related books/journals/websites

Within HKSAR, ‘reading music-related books/journals/websites’ was found to be the most popular type of professional development in music among teacher-participants. Reading is widely recognised as a useful way for teachers to acquire individually appropriate knowledge and/or to reflect on their teaching practices. The importance of reading can be mentally visualised in the Chinese proverb ‘A book holds a house of gold’ and the German proverb ‘A book is like a garden carried in the pocket’ (sources unknown). Researchers also found that reading professional magazines, journals and other materials can have a positive impact on teaching practices (Campbell & St J. Neill, 1994; Herzog & Koll, 1990; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). Nevertheless, Commeysar and DeGroff (1998) remind us that teachers may generally tend to read practitioner-focused journal articles, books and professional newspapers rather than research journals or electronic resources.

In HKSAR, however, there seems to be a lack of localised and regularly published practitioner magazines/journals/books/websites, particularly in early childhood music education. Most of the available music-related websites are mainly based on Western contexts (e.g. www.isme.org; www.vosa.org). Even though one might argue that, while Chinese professional magazines/reading materials are available from Taiwan and mainland China, both the localisation and heterogeneity of teaching materials should still be a main goal for enhancing the quality of education. In addition to the translated materials from Western resources, there is a need for more culturally relevant audio and/or visual materials for local teachers in HKSAR. In South Australia, comparatively speaking, localised (e.g. Kazimierczak, 2004) and/or up-to-date country-wide music reading materials (e.g. Russell-Bowie, 2008) are more available to practitioners. However, the present study showed that reading professional materials may not be a popular activity for South Australian early childhood teachers. No significant difference was found in this matter between HKSAR and South Australia. Therefore, an examination of possible cause and consequence of South Australian early childhood teachers’ professional reading habits may be needed.

Watching music-related videos/TV

The research found a relationship between teachers’ cultural contexts and their involvement in ‘watching music-related videos/TV’ as professional music development. South Australian teachers had a significantly higher level of engagement in ‘watching music-related videos/TV’ than did those in HKSAR. Such a cultural difference may be because of the greater availability of music-related TV programs for adults in Australia. In South Australia, during the research period (academic year of 2007–2008), music-related TV programs for adults such as Australian Idol, Dancing with the Stars, So You Think You Can Dance and It Takes Two were regularly available in free local TV channels. In 2008, besides the aforementioned ongoing programs, Battle of the Choirs was also on television during prime time in South Australia. All these music-related programs not only entertain the general public, but also popularise music among the locals by broadening South Australians’ understanding of musical genres and repertoires. In fact, watching TV is the most popular leisure activity for Australians. A report (ABS, 2008, paragraph 4) showed that 87 per cent of Australians watched TV for an average of nearly three hours (179 minutes) per day (down slightly from the 1997 figure of 182 minutes). Such a statistic supports the results of this study that ‘watching videos/TV’ is Australian teachers’ most popular activity for professional music development. Watching video/TV programs has indeed been recognised as one of the appropriate types of teachers’ professional development (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

In HKSAR, relatively speaking, music-related TV programs for adults during the research period were fewer. Programs are generally produced with the purpose either solely for fun/entertainment (e.g. Minutes to Fame or Jade Solid Gold) or for professionals (Asian Youth Orchestra Hong Kong Concert 2006, Art Odyssey or Young Chinese Performers). Although one may argue that TV programs in-between these two extremes are still available (e.g. We are the United Asian by Radio Television of Hong Kong RTHK), these types of programs are generally not shown on a regular basis nor in prime time when local early childhood teachers could easily access them. Moreover, statistically speaking, HKSAR people spend less time watching television (162 minutes per day) than is done in South Australia. A recent research study (Lee, Chang, Chung, Dickie, & Selker, 2007) confirmed that television is still one of the most popular entertainment resources in the modern life. TV is a machine actively participating in our daily life and providing information’ (p. 329). The term ‘information’ may further indicate knowledge for teachers’ professional development in music. Also, watching educationally relevant television
can be regarded as one of the informal experiences of professional development for teachers (Ganser, 2000). Therefore, television producers in both cultural contexts should consider the possible direct and indirect impact of music-related TV programs on early childhood teachers’ professional development.

**Discussing music-related topics with friends/colleagues**

The present research found a relationship between teachers’ cultural contexts and their involvement in ‘discussing music-related topics with friends/colleagues’ as professional music development. These topics include their music teaching and learning experiences with young children, and their personal musical experiences. Such discussions enable teachers to share their music-related experiences and ideas in a socially interactive and peer-supportive environment. Results showed that South Australian teachers had significantly higher levels of engagement in ‘discussing music-related topics with friends/colleagues’ than did those in HKSAR. Such a finding may be owing to the different work arrangement between the two cultural contexts. In South Australia, early childhood teachers within the selected centres in this study were allocated specific and clear personal break times (e.g. morning/afternoon coffee breaks and lunch times) during work time. Teachers, therefore, were provided with opportunities to interact with colleagues/friends.

Within the selected centres in HKSAR, however, such breaks were relatively few and unspecified. Because of the invisible pressure from the overloaded timetable for children and their administrative workload, HKSAR teachers rarely interact with colleagues during working hours, except at formal staff meetings. As well as this different work arrangement between the two cultural contexts, research by McAllister and Irvine (2000) and Tang (1996) shows that ‘discussion’ is a relatively more common learning mode in the West than in the East. Another research study based on the Australian and Asian contexts also provides similar findings (Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001). Therefore a short break with a cup of coffee/tea seems not only to be important for teachers’ wellbeing but may also be indirectly beneficial to children’s musical learning. There is a need to encourage and to strengthen a discussion-based culture among early childhood teachers in both cultural contexts, especially as researchers (Atherton, 1999; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Halstead & Taylor, 2000) have found that such a learning mode is effective and efficient.

**Practicing musical skills**

The present research found a relationship between teachers’ cultural contexts and their involvement in ‘practising musical skills’ as a form of professional development. South Australian teachers had significantly higher levels of engagement in ‘practising music-related skills’ than did those in HKSAR. Such a cultural difference may be because of South Australian teachers’ more frequent opportunities to interact with professional musicians. In SA, inviting professional music performers to centres is quite a common practice. Teachers are not only encouraged to interact with professional performers, but are also able to learn musical skills from them. Welch and Adams (2003) confirmed that the learning of musical skills can be enhanced by ‘appropriate guidance and feedback from an “expert” teacher’, and ‘expert’ teaching could be from ‘a peer, a specialist music teacher or just someone who is more expert in a particular aspect of music’ (p. 10). Although practice is likely to have the greatest benefit when it is regular, systematic and structured, Green (2001) indicated that musical skill can also be developed and practised informally.

In HKSAR, however, inviting ‘expert’ music performers to come to childcare centres is relatively uncommon within the selected centres owing to more limited resources and networks. One may argue that there are some available links between local ‘expert’ music organisations and educational settings, such as the recent program entitled HSBC Insurance Creative Notes 09/10 by the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (2009). Similar arguments can be found in recent research by local educators who identified several available professional outreach and/or school-visit programs in HKSAR (Ho & Law, 2009). Nevertheless, these ‘music-in-education’ programs by professional musicians mainly focus on students and/or teachers in local primary or secondary educational settings.

**Conclusion**

This cross-cultural study has shown that early childhood teachers are interested in and benefit from undertaking professional development which can extend their generalist training in music. It has identified the similarities and differences in music professional development in the cultures studied and highlighted teachers’ differing needs for increasing their music skills. The study affirms the need for more research in and support for the provision of skilled and expert models for early childhood teachers in order to support the development of their musical skills. Such research could include replicating the study presented here with a larger sample and investigating further the music education components of pre-service early childhood teacher training programs in Australia.

In addition, a better allocation of resources for facilitating teachers’ engagement in professional dialogue with these skilled and expert models, both inside and outside childcare centres, may also be desirable. Music professional development will continue to be important for the early childhood field and needs constant updating.
References


