

Full Length Research Paper

# Developing Self-Efficacy in Play-Based and Creative Music Approaches through Arts Education Programme

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## Abstract

There has been little published research on in-service early childhood teachers' self-efficacy in teaching music. The major Hong Kong education policy document, *Hong Kong Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) advocates 'learning through play' as the central pedagogy for Hong Kong Pre-primary education. On the other hand, teacher training in music has long been inadequate for the early childhood teachers. Responding to the education guideline and policy in Hong Kong, this study sought to determine whether completing a music teacher education programme would have a significant impact on in-service early childhood teachers' self-efficacy in teaching music with play-based approach. Adopting an exploratory quantitative design, this study emphasized the collection and analysis of quantitative data. The results showed a significant increase in the participants' self-efficacy score after completing a music teacher education programme which emphasized on play-based approach, thus demonstrating the importance for the universities to provide adequate and well-tailored music education programmes for in-service early childhood teachers.

**Keywords:** music programmes, self-efficacy in arts education, creative pedagogy, early childhood, policy

## Introduction

The Hong Kong *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* advocates 'learning through play' as the central pedagogy for Hong Kong Pre-primary education (Curriculum Development Council, 2006, p.12). The notion that young children should learn through play has long been acknowledged by educational theorists such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, and is widely endorsed by current research in early childhood education (Niland, 2009). Since arts and music is an important learning area specified in the *Hong Kong Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006), there is a challenge for early childhood teachers to gain professional knowledge on the subject, including music skills and teaching skills, and to acquire an understanding of how to integrate music into early childhood education.

Due to the insufficient pre-service training in teaching music to young children, many in-service early childhood teachers are unconfident in leading music activities (Chan, 2012; Vannatta-Hall, 2010). Based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of a music pedagogy programme on in-service early childhood teachers' self-perceived

confidence and competence in teaching music with play-based approach. While very limited studies have been done on how the music teacher education programmes would influence the in-service early childhood teachers, the current study is the first study in Hong Kong on how music pedagogy education changed in-service early childhood teachers' self-efficacy in teaching music. The findings reflect how the music teacher education programme would make impacts on teachers' self-efficacy in teaching music, and may provide implications for teacher educators, universities, and policy makers.

## Play-based Music Pedagogy in Early Childhood

Niland (2009) suggested that play is at the heart of contemporary early childhood pedagogy. Obviously, musical play is a powerful medium for young children to explore various musical concepts and elements. While numerous researchers have suggested that it is difficult to define play in early childhood education (Johnson, Christies, & Yawkey, 2005; Lillemyr, 2001a, 2001b), most theorists and educators agreed that play should include free choice, enjoyment, self-motivation, and an emphasis on process rather than on outcome (Brock, Dodds, Jarvis

& Olusoga, 2009; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2008). Hundeide (2003) suggested that play is a pedagogical situation in early childhood education, and children's perspective is closely related to the teacher's actions and other experiences in school. It is crucial to note that a significant dimension of both play and learning is creativity, which is seen as important in all domains of learning, including music, in early childhood education (Lau, 2006; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008).

Researchers are increasingly identifying the significant value of musical play in the development of children's musicality (Gluschankof, 2002; Morin, 2001; Nilan, 2009; Smithrim, 1997). Spontaneous singing, sound exploration, instrument playing, dramatizing, dancing, ensemble, improvisation are all evident in demonstrating that music is a regular part of children's play (Nilan, 2009). There has long been a philosophical debate about how to strike a balance between musical skill development and creativity (Abbs, 2003). In this regard, Nilan (2009) suggested that various forms of play could also lead children to musical understanding and skills. For example, some creative pedagogical approaches, such as Kodaly, use singing games within children's social context as a foundation for contextual musical literacy, while the Orff approach also uses body percussion as a foundation for developing children's musical understanding (*ibid.*). As an experienced early childhood music teacher, I also witnessed how children learned different musical skills and knowledge through these play-based and creative pedagogies, e.g. Kodaly's hand signs, Orff's body percussion. The happy learning atmosphere in which the children engage actively by exploring, moving and singing rather than just sitting in the classroom and listening to the teacher all the time impresses me. This kind of approach can make the learning experiences enjoyable and motivate children's interests in learning music.

While play-based and creative pedagogy has numerous benefits for children's learning, it is also important to note its limitations. Obviously, children may not be learning the concrete knowledge that their parents expect them to learn, e.g. music theory, musical performance technique (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1993). As such, the use of this pedagogy may create challenges for teachers to educate and convince the parents. Importantly, the implementation of a developmentally appropriate play-based pedagogy requires teachers' relevant knowledge, skills, and attitude. In this regard, music teacher education plays a vital role to help the teachers be successful in adopting the pedagogy.

### **Music Education for Generalists**

Stein (2002) suggested that teachers are vital in establishing musical learning as a priority in early childhood education. As in other parts of the world, early childhood teachers in Hong Kong are educated as generalists and are required to regularly plan curricula and implement musical activities for young children (Kilgallon

& Maloney, 2003). They usually receive interdisciplinary education and therefore have very limited expertise in a number of subject areas, including music (Ray, Bowman, & Robbins, 2006). Goldhaber (2002) suggested that teachers' educational levels, as well as the relevance of their education to the subjects they teach, can make a big difference in teaching. Furthermore, Garbett (2003) noted that there is a correlation between high-quality early childhood education and teachers' subject qualifications and quality practices in learning and teaching. As such, even though many early childhood teachers seem to be keenly aware that music is crucially important for young children as a means of self-expression, they often display a limited understanding of what a high-quality early childhood music programme should involve (Scott-Kassner, 1999).

Research suggested that many generalists have low confidence in teaching music (Chan, 2012; Vannatta-Hall, 2010). The findings of these researches are in alignment with my own observation, both through classroom teaching and on-site supervision for my students' practicum. Seddon and Biasutti's (2008) research in the United Kingdom found that generalists compare their informally educated music skills with those of music specialists, thereby reinforcing their perceived inadequacies. Cleave and Sharp's (1986) research in the United Kingdom also identified lack of confidence as a major obstacle to the teaching of various art forms, including music. Mills's (1989) study in the United Kingdom and Barr's (2006) study in the United States found that generalists who lack basic knowledge in music are not comfortable with incorporating it into the curriculum. Furthermore, Scott-Kassner's (1999) study noted that because many early childhood teachers in the United States lack confidence as musicians or music teachers, they often rely on commercial teaching materials when teaching music. Colwell's (2008) study in the United States found that generalists showed improved comfort levels in integrating music into the curriculum after taking a music pedagogy course. Young (2005, 2007a, 2007b) suggested that early childhood education generalists in the United Kingdom should be provided with regular access to learning opportunities for enriching their educational experiences in music; the provision of such experiences could be supported by a greater level of monitoring and coordination from early childhood music organisations that are widely recognised at national or regional levels.

### **Self-Efficacy Theory**

Self-efficacy refers to one's self-perceived competence as opposed to actual competence; the self-assurance with which people approach and manage difficult tasks plays a significant role in determining how they make use of their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is defined as 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the

courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura, 1997, p.3).

Studies of self-efficacy were first conducted in the field of psychology. Psychologists made efforts to measure self-efficacy in order to assess the effectiveness of psychotherapy on patients' self-perceptions of their capabilities in confronting phobias (Bandura, 1982). Bandura and Mischel presented their respective theories of social learning in 1963 that broadened the insights of learning theories with the principles of observational learning and vicarious reinforcement. Shortly afterward, Rotter (1966) advanced his own social learning theory, arguing that an individual's behaviour in a particular situation is determined by two variables—expectancy (probability) and reinforcement (behaviour). Rotter (1966) further explained that more emphasis should be placed on the influence of the environment than on learning experiences. Rotter's theory mostly emphasised causal beliefs about the relationship between action and outcome as opposed to the individual's personal efficacy. In this sense, Rotter's perception is different from Bandura's self-efficacy perception, which references particular accomplishments and the achievement of specific outcomes, and involves a belief in the individual's capability to systematise and implement specific behaviours so as to achieve those outcomes (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 1996).

Bandura (1986) suggested that efficacy beliefs can determine how much effort people devote to a particular task and how long they will persist when faced with obstacles and challenges. As such, Bandura (1993) argued that self-efficacy beliefs play a significant role in determining one's level of achievement and are therefore regarded as good predictors of performance and achievement. Bandura (1986) further suggested that self-efficacy beliefs can change over time. Berry and West (1993) characterised this aspect of self-efficacy as follows: 'It is dynamic and malleable, subject to changes in task demands, situational determinants, social context, and individual development' (p.353). When applied to the field of education and the role of teachers in the classroom, the concept of teacher self-efficacy is defined as the belief that one's capabilities can bring about desirable changes in students' behaviours and achievements (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Dembo and Gibson (1985) suggested that teachers who do not have a strong sense of self-efficacy (that is, they do not believe they are able to positively influence students' performance) might not be able to fulfil

their responsibilities in motivating students or take the necessary actions to do so.

## Current Study and Research Question

Based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, this study aimed to provide a measurement of self-efficacy to determine whether there was a significant change in the perceived self-efficacy of early childhood teachers who were enrolled in a music pedagogy course. In order to understand the impact of a music pedagogy course, the study investigated teachers' self-perceived confidence and competence in teaching music before and after taking the course. The music pedagogy course in this study was a one-semester course consisting of 12 classes. The course was designed according to the *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) and the educational needs of in-service early childhood teachers, integrating various pedagogies through both theory and practice. I hope the findings of this study can help universities and teachers learn more about continuing teacher education in music and plan pedagogy courses that will enhance the abilities of early childhood generalists in teaching music. This study examines the following research question: To what extent will a music pedagogy course impact in-service teachers' self-efficacy in teaching music to young children?

## Method

### Participants

There were 30 participants in the study, and all were enrolled in an informal professional teacher education course which is offered by a non-government-subsidised institute in Hong Kong. The principles of 'learning through play' and 'creativity' stated in the Pre-Primary Curriculum Guide (2006) were carefully considered in this course. Also, other principles from my literature review, such as 'learning by doing' (Rogovin, 1998), was also considered in this course in which hands-on and practical experiences were emphasised. As shown in Table 1, there were 29 females and 1 male in the class, and their ages ranged from 22 to 27. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 year to 5 years, as shown in Table 2. All of the participants were kindergarten teachers at the time, and none of them held a senior rank such as head teacher or principal. The students attended the course for 2 hours once a week for 12 weeks.

**Table 1:** Age of Participants

Age	Number of female	Number of male	Total number of participants
22	5	0	5
23	5	0	5
24	5	0	5
25	6	0	6
26	5	0	5
27	3	1	4

**Table 2:** Participants' Years of Teaching

Years of early childhood teaching	Number of participants
1	6
2	6
3	7
4	7
5	4

### **Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey (MTSES)**

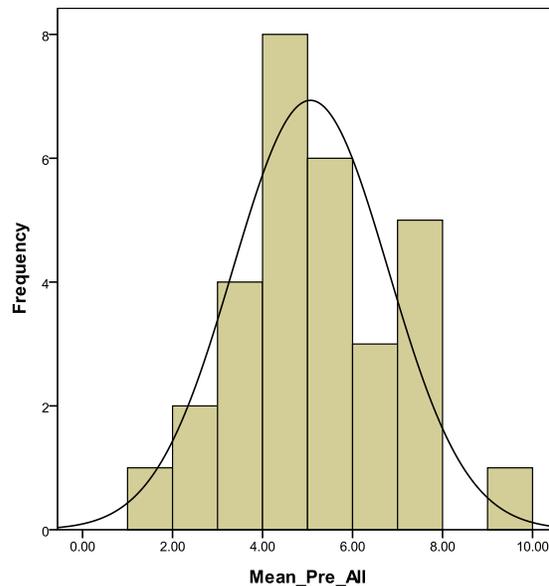
The researcher developed the Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey, with reference to Bandura's (2006) guidelines for developing self-efficacy measures as well as measures adopted in other self-efficacy literature. Bandura (2006) stated that self-efficacy scales must be tailored to activity domains and be associated with factors determining the quality of functioning in the specific area of interest. Accordingly, the questions used in the music self-efficacy scales were closely related to the specific learning areas of the music pedagogy course.

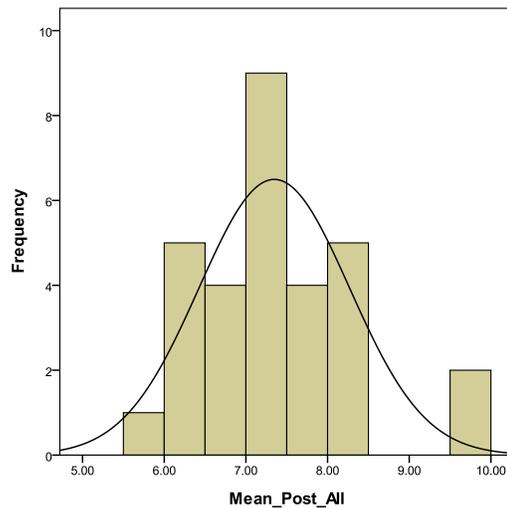
The Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey measured students' self-perceived confidence and competency in teaching music. It was administered at the beginning of the music pedagogy course and again upon completion of the course. The Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey consisted of 34 questions based on the four main areas of the music pedagogy course, which were established with reference to the goals and objectives of arts education as

stated in the Hong Kong *Guide to the Pre-primary Curriculum* (Curriculum Development Council, 2006). The students were asked to complete the pre-Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey during the first class, before receiving any type of instruction, teaching practice, class activity, or assignments in the early childhood music education course. After completing the music pedagogy course, participants were asked to complete the post-Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey at the end of the last day of course.

### **Results**

The frequency distributions of the music teaching self-efficacy mean scores on both the pre- and post-Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey revealed normal distributions. Figure 1 shows the frequency distributions of the mean self-efficacy scores of the pre- and post-Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey.





**Figure 1:** Frequency distributions of the mean scores for music teaching self-efficacy, 0(not confident) to 10(completely confident)

The quantitative data from the Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey showed a significant overall increase in the participants' reported music teaching self-efficacy after completing the course. Additionally, as the course was comprised of four main areas, namely (a) music and language; (b) ensemble playing: singing, body percussion, and ostinato; (c) hand signs and creative music activities; and (d) choreography and the use of dance in fostering children's learning in music, significant increases in music teaching self-efficacy scores were revealed for each pair of all the subscales. As shown in Table 3, the pairwise comparison for music and language revealed the lowest increase (28.8%) in music teaching self-efficacy, while

hand signs and creative music activities revealed the highest (68.7%). The other subscales of the Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey also revealed satisfactory increases in participants' self-efficacy—namely, ensemble playing: singing, body percussion, and ostinato (53.8%) and choreography and the use of dance in fostering children's learning in music (46.6%). The final subscale of the Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey also revealed a significant overall increase (43.8%) in participants' music teaching self-efficacy after completing the music pedagogy course. These data have shown the significant impact of the music pedagogy course in all of the four main areas being covered.

**Table 3:** Reliability Statistics Tables

Pre-MTSES: Music & Language

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Play percussion instruments	29.47	93.637	.836	.935
Use percussion instruments to enhance children's learning in language	30.00	98.207	.817	.937
Use a variety of props to enhance children's learning in language	30.23	93.564	.815	.938
Read a poem in a rhythmic way	29.63	90.861	.857	.932
Teach children to play percussion instruments	29.60	96.593	.846	.934
Lead children to read a poem in a rhythmic and musical way	30.07	97.513	.841	.934

Cronbach's alpha=.945

Post-MTSES: Music & Language

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Play percussion instruments	38.30	31.459	.868	.902
Use percussion instruments to enhance children's learning in language	38.40	31.214	.871	.902
Use a variety of props to enhance children's learning in language	38.53	31.016	.708	.929
Read a poem in a rhythmic way	38.30	32.286	.782	.914
Teach children to play percussion instruments	38.37	34.033	.834	.910
Lead children to read a poem in a rhythmic and musical way	38.60	34.869	.716	.922

Cronbach's alpha=.92

#### Pre-MTSES: Hand Signs and Creative Music Activities

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Demonstrate the use of hand signs to young children	12.13	53.775	.893	.944
Teach hand signs in music classes for young children in an appropriate way	12.70	55.321	.904	.939
Design music activities by using hand signs in a creative and interesting way	13.17	56.006	.919	.935
Foster children's interest in singing by using hand signs	12.80	60.166	.864	.952

Cronbach's alpha=.956

#### Post-MTSES: Hand Signs and Creative Music Activities

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Demonstrate the use of hand signs to young children	21.40	13.076	.882	.923
Teach hand signs in music classes for young children in an appropriate way	21.53	13.085	.917	.911
Design music activities by using hand signs in a creative and interesting way	21.33	14.437	.854	.932
Foster children's interest in singing by using hand signs	21.43	14.668	.822	.941

Cronbach's alpha=.944

## Discussion

The findings of this study suggested that music pedagogy programmes can significantly enhance in-service early childhood teachers' self-perceived confidence and competence in teaching music to young children. The findings were well supported by other relevant research on teachers' professional development (e.g. Battersby & Cave, 2014; Forsythe, Kinney, & Braun, 2007; Chan,

2012). In many cases only one course in music is offered in pre-service early childhood teacher education programmes in Hong Kong, similar to many teacher education programmes throughout the world. Such music courses usually need to cover both music fundamentals and music pedagogy. Moreover, as suggested by Ballantyne's (2006) study, such courses often fail to connect practical pedagogical skills with professional knowledge and therefore might not be useful for pre-

service teachers. The situation is even worse in some local institutions, as they only offer one arts-related course covering various areas such as drama, visual arts, dance, and music. In such cases, the contact hours for each area of arts are insufficient. As suggested by the findings of this study, a course that focuses on the practical aspects of teaching music, and is tailored to the needs of early childhood teachers, could fulfil many needs for early childhood music teachers. This carries the significant implication that the development of high-quality pre-service music pedagogy courses that suit the practical and professional needs of early childhood teachers should be a future direction in teacher education.

This study has further supported and confirmed the findings of other studies that promote play-based applied activities (e.g., listening, singing, moving, and playing musical instruments) as a major curricular focus when providing education for generalists in early childhood education (Bresler, 1995; Gifford, 1993; Propst, 2003; Saunders & Baker, 1991; Temmerman, 1997). In particular, the findings of this study supported Kelly's (1998) study which has indicated that teachers valued experiences that involved pedagogical strategies, which can be directly applicable to their teaching. Moreover, the findings also have significant implications and have added knowledge for the future planning and delivery of teacher education courses, particularly for the in-service early childhood teachers. The music pedagogy course in this study enhanced the early childhood teachers' mastery experiences by offering a great deal of practical experience (e.g. the development of musical and pedagogical skills) throughout the course. Through such practical experiences, the early childhood teachers' self-efficacy in teaching music significantly increased. Therefore, the present research has implied that in order to serve the urgent professional needs of the teachers, the design of the future music pedagogy course for in-service early childhood teachers should put more emphasis on the practical aspects that could be applied easily to their music teaching.

Given the importance of play in child development, 'play' was incorporated into all areas of the music pedagogy course in order to enhance the participants' confidence and competence in leading play-based music activities for young children. As the developer of the music pedagogy course, I also hoped that an enjoyable class experience would help eliminate participants' teaching anxieties and thus encourage them to use these play-based and creative elements in their own music classrooms. In contrast to the initial low confidence level in teaching these four areas (as reflected in the pre-Music Teaching Self-efficacy Survey), the findings revealed the participants' increased confidence in leading music activities in these areas, which involve significant components of play and creativity. As such, this study significantly implies that there is an urgent need for continuing education among early childhood teachers in the areas of play and creativity in music education, since

these areas are crucially important for creating meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning environments for young children. In this regard, this study also implies that hands-on experience contributes significantly to early childhood teachers' knowledge and attitudes in these areas.

Teacher self-efficacy is a teacher's belief in his or her competency to affect change in students' learning outcomes (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010). This is based on experiences where teachers see that their teaching results in students achieving or even improving upon learning objectives (de Vries, 2013). Such beliefs usually result in higher teacher commitment, enthusiasm, and even changed teaching behaviours (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; de Vries, 2013). As such, promoting teacher self-efficacy is an important step toward helping generalists integrate the skills, knowledge, and understanding needed for teaching (Kretchmer, 2002; Buckner, 2008). In this study, the significant increase in participants' teaching self-efficacy supports the importance of practical experience as a core component of music teacher education for generalists.

Although this study was conducted with in-service early childhood teachers in Hong Kong, the findings could have significant implications beyond the original context of the study. The findings of this study provide an empirical basis for the future planning and further enhancement of teacher education programmes in early childhood music based on the professional and practical needs of in-service teachers. The results of this study suggest that it is possible for a one-semester music teacher education course to significantly boost the music teaching self-efficacy of early childhood teachers. Such results reveal the importance and powerful impact of music teacher education for early childhood teachers. Since the teacher education course in this study emphasised practical and hands-on experience for the participants, the results highlight the significance of such experiences in raising teacher self-efficacy in teaching music. In light of the significant impact of music teacher education programmes, continuous professional development is needed for early childhood teachers to renew their knowledge and skills, keep pace with ongoing changes, and broaden their vision to adopt excellent teaching practices that nurture the holistic development of young children (Chan, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

It is important to conclude the key contributions of this study. Firstly, as one of the pioneer studies in the impact of music pedagogy education on in-service early childhood teachers' self-efficacy in Hong Kong, this study provides significant insights into the role of in-service music pedagogy education, and such insights would facilitate further research in this area. Secondly, this study contributes new knowledge on how a teacher education programme can impact teaching self-efficacy in music

Hong Kong (e.g. the significance of play-based learning and creativity in the teacher education programme for in-service early childhood teachers). Therefore, this music pedagogy course can serve as a model for future teacher education programmes. Thirdly, the success of this music pedagogy course provides significant insights for different stakeholders in education, such as teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, and government policy makers, for their future endeavour in early childhood education and music teacher education.

Teacher self-efficacy is a small idea with a huge impact. Teachers' self-judgment of their teaching competency can greatly affect teaching behaviours, student attitudes, and student achievements, which in turn influence the quality and effectiveness of different learning and teaching activities. This study contributes new knowledge by extending our understanding of how teacher education programmes can affect teaching efficacy in music. In this sense, it is of great importance for teacher education institutes, school leaders, administrators, teacher educators, and policymakers to have a holistic understanding of how these beliefs are formed and sustained throughout different stages of a teacher's career development.

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