

EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN MUSIC EDUCATION BY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT INTERNS

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Abstract

The musical experience at an early stage for infants and toddlers contributes to the development of music intelligence. As the consequence, it is important for the caregivers and parents to encourage the young children to obtain musical experience at the earliest stage of learning. Daycare centers are currently the main stream of childcare for more than 20,000 infants and toddlers aged 0-2 in Taiwan. It is postulated that the Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns may enhance a better music learning experience for infants and toddlers at daycare centers. This is to ensure that the interns who are potentially the future caregivers will possess the minimal music teaching skills to allow adequate learning to take place for infants and toddlers. This is one of the contemporary issues which educational experts and scholars in the field of child care should pay close attention to.

This project is a qualitative case study and aims to gain an understanding of the current situation of the music learning environment provided by the daycare center for infants and toddlers using the in-depth study of the internship of the five-year college students from the Department of Early Childhood Care and Education at Shu-Zen Junior College of Medicine and Management (SZMC) in Taiwan. In addition, this study allows the exploration of the relationship between the effectiveness of music learning of SZMC interns and their pre-entry into the field of teaching for infants and toddlers.

This study concluded that during the period of practice, the interns were able to gain a better understanding of the music learning environment at daycare centers. The understanding would include both the structured and unstructured informal guidance music activities. Interns can get the opportunity to understand and participate in the field of music learning at the daycare centers. The experience also helps interns to examine their basic musical abilities such as singing, playing musical instruments, rhythm creation, body movement and music activity design, as well as their performance in the field of music learning for infants and toddlers.

The results of this study can act as a reference for the music-related curriculum planning of the College's Early Childhood Care and Education Department. This can enable the educators to plan for a long-term follow-up of the effectiveness of the Early Childhood Care

interns and their guidance of infants and toddler's music learning at the daycare centers across Taiwan.

Keywords: *infants and toddlers, daycare centers, music learning, Department of Early Childhood Care interns, music learning*

Introduction

Background

In accordance with the “*Early Childhood Education and Care Act*” (Ministry of Education, 2013a) in Taiwan, the educational service for 2 to 6 year old will be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, while the oversight of the education and care for infants and toddlers who are under 2 years of age will be provided by the Ministry of Health and Welfare. In recent years, infants’ and toddlers’ education and care issues have been frequently reported in Taiwan. This includes the multiple levels of policy planning for the integration of child care, the establishment of nursery institutions and the construction of the national community nursery system. In addition, the expenditure and subsidy of nursery expenses, and caregivers’ training have been in the national spotlight in recent times.

Furthermore, because of the complexity of family factors for dual-income families and single-parent families, often the parents are unable to provide the resources to take care of children at home; therefore, many infants and toddlers need to be taken care of by external support such as care at community daycare centers. This provision and sociological demand had in the past caused public concerns especially in the modern Taiwan. In order to solve the plight of working families with the child care issues, the Ministry of Health and Welfare’s plan for childcare services for infants and toddlers aged 0-2 have focused on the improvement of three main streams of care: home-based care, institutional and community-based care (<https://www.mohw.gov.tw/cp-88-230-1-40.html>).

According to the statistics from the Ministry of Health and Welfare, by the end of June 2017, there were 743 private and 108 public daycare centers in Taiwan. These daycare facilities provide services for 21,761 0-2-year-old infants and toddlers (Social and Family Affairs Administration Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2017b). The type of institutional daycare centers includes full-day, half-day and temporary childcare. The full-day childcare up to 8 hours a day is the most common. Therefore, the process of growth and the demand of care of infants and toddlers are becoming more and more recognized.

Howard Gardner, a psychologist at Harvard University, proposed “*Multiple Intelligences Theory*” aimed to show that human beings have eight kinds of intelligence. They include verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, inter-personal/social, intra-personal/introspective and naturalist intelligence. These descriptive intelligences can only be fully realized with proper guidance and learning (Gardner, 1983, 2000; Wang, 2006). In simpler terms, every child essentially has music potential.

According to the statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009), the influence of early experience on children’s development

will become more obvious over time. It proposed that proper music education can improve the physical fitness, social capabilities, emotions, aesthetics, intelligence and language development of young children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). American music education scholar Edwin E. Gordon (2003) also produced a similar statement. He believes that children from birth to 9 years old are at an important stage in which the development of music potential, through the caregivers and parents' structured or unstructured informal guidance, and/or with the music teachers' formal instruction, can enhance children's music experience, and musicality (Gordon, 2003; Rauscher & Hinton, 2011; Kim, 2013; Gordon & Brown, 2013; Liu, 2016). Therefore, music learning can be regarded as an indispensable part of the growth process of infants and young children (McDonald & Simons, 1989; Ilari, 2002; Gordon, 2003; Nardo, Custodero, Persellin & Fox, 2006; Hallam, 2010).

Scholars also found that the caregivers often use music activities to interact with young children at daycare centers (Vannatta-Hall, 2010; Kim & Kemple, 2011). Both the caregivers and music teachers are equally effective in enlightening young children's music learning and development (de l'Etoile, 2001; Nardo, Custodero, Persellin & Fox, 2006; Vannatta-Hall, 2010; Hsee, 2011; Young, 2016). Since infants and toddlers are in daycare centers for a long period of time in Taiwan, caregivers need to be equipped with professional knowledge and training in order to guide infants and toddlers' daily routine and activity designs.

Today, Taiwan's higher education systems for training the care providers of young children include the four-year Early Childhood Education Department of university and the five-year Early Childhood Care and Education Department of a junior college. Each educational institution will have their own curriculum by ensuring that students have enough experiences in practicum before graduation. However, the questions we ought to ask are:

- *Do the daycare centers in Taiwan provide adequate opportunities for music learning or music-related activities for infants and toddlers?*
- *Do the Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns have the minimal music skills to guide infants and toddler's music learning during their internship?*
- *What is the current performance of Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns at the internship field?*

There is no clear research discussion on these topics yet.

In summary, the musical experience at an early stage for infants and toddlers contributes to the development of music intelligence. As the consequence, it is important for the caregivers or parents to encourage young children to obtain musical experience at an earlier stage of learning. Daycare centers are currently the main stream of childcare for more than 20,000 infants and toddlers aged 0-2 in Taiwan. It is postulated that the Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns may enhance a better music learning experience for infants and toddlers. This is to ensure that these future caregivers will possess the minimal music skills to allow adequate music learning to take place. The experts and scholars in the field of child care should pay close attention to these contemporary issues.

Study purpose

Based on the above research background, this study aims to gain an understanding of the current situation of the music learning environment provided by the daycare centers for infants and toddlers using the in-depth study of the internship of the five-year college students from the Early Childhood Care and Education Department. Furthermore, this study allows the exploration of the relationship between the effectiveness of music learning in school of the interns and their teaching for infants and toddlers at daycare center.

Questions

Based on the summation of the research described, this study explores three issues:

1. *What is the current music learning environment provided by the daycare center?*
2. *How do the Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns perform in the infants and toddlers' music learning environment at the daycare center?*
3. *What is the relationship of the Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns' musical training at their educational institution and their performance of music teaching at the daycare center?*

Methodology

This project is a qualitative case study (Yin, 2003). The researchers conducted in-depth study on the interns from one of the junior colleges with an early childhood education program training in Taiwan. Data were collected retrospectively through observations, video-taped teaching sessions, field notes, interviews, and internship logs. Data were then conformed to descriptive processing and inductive analysis.

Research Field

The field of this study is an agreement between the institutional care (daycare center) internship and the Early Childhood Care and Education Department of Shu-Zen Junior College of Medicine and Management (SZMC), Kaohsiung, Taiwan. The daycare center must fulfill the following criteria: government approved daycare centers with full-time nursery care for infants and toddlers enrollment aged 0-2 years, the director of the unit and the caregivers agree to carry out this study, the parents or guardians of infants and toddlers consenting to their children being observed, and have interns allocated from SZMC Early Childhood Care and Education Department.

After fulfilling these criteria, the Hope (anonymous) Daycare Center was selected. It was officially registered by Kaohsiung Social Bureau. The center was established in 2011 and has more than 413.23 m² of activity (including outdoor) space. The center is expected to provide a learning environment for children with the spirit of M. Montessori education method by utilizing the concept of love, care and respect, combined with life ability and educational opportunities. Nine qualified caregivers were staffed at the center. This center currently enrolls 32 young children aged from 4 to 34 months. A total of 6 interns were assigned to each class according to their age in lamb class (4-12 months), calf class (12-24 months) and elephant class (24-34 months). Based on the *Standards for Establishing Children and Youth Welfare Institutes* (Ministry of Education, 2013b) in Taiwan, the nursery/daycare centers can routinely offer nursery services to

children under 2 years old (infants and toddlers). Some of the nursery centers, which have already enrolled children under age of 2, can apply for a continual care of these children, not exceeding further one year in age before moving on to the next stage of early childhood schools. This is in accordance with the provisions of *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* (Ministry of Education, 2013a). Therefore, in our study, the children who are 24-34-month-old (under 3 years of age) were included in the study.

Participants

Hope Daycare Center promotes opportunities of music learnings for infants and toddlers. A fully qualified music teacher is employed to spend three separate half an hour periods with the three groups of children of different ages. In our study, there participate 6 interns, who are on the last year of a 5-year Early Childhood Care and Education degree program at SZMC. They received credits for various music courses. All of the interns completed a 4-week rotation. Two interns were assigned to each of the 3 classes with different age children.

Limitations of the Study

The current study is limited to only one daycare center with SZMC intern placement. The powers of the study and sample size were small. Therefore, it may not be able to represent the daycare widely. In addition, the interns involved were only from SZMC, a single educational institution with a robust early childhood education program. It is difficult to relate to other institutions' practicum curriculum.

Results

Research question 1: What is the current music learning environment provided by the daycare center?

The researcher reviewed the daily schedule at the Hope Daycare Center and spent time observing the teaching sessions. Teachers' instruction plans and teaching records were made available for this project. Hope Daycare Center is very well equipped with many modern music activities specifically for learning processes. These music activities conform to the E. Gordon (2003) principles of structured and unstructured informal guidance:

- A constructive music learning program where teachers or parents are heavily involved in the theory and curriculum;
- Minimizing of planning and structuring which allows young children to learn with musical spontaneity.

These two principles have one common goal: to allow young children to learn music in a non-threatening environment.

A. Music Teacher's structured informal guidance music activities

Hope Daycare Center has appointed a music teacher H, who received her qualifications in the United States. The music teacher instructs on a 30-minute weekly basis in the three classes using the structured informal guidance principles. Her teaching materials evolved from her previous experience. The songs and music used were in English.

Before the commencement of the teaching sessions, all the tables and chairs were removed to allow the music teacher and the children adequate space for teaching. The music activities included: singing, listening to music, playing instrument, free movement and chanting by using egg shakers, tambourines, triangles, drums and wood blocks. The genre of music is variety such as jazz, folk music, traditional children's song and pop music.

During the informal guided music activities, the music teacher will encourage the children to pay attention to her with eye contacts and individual interactions but will not force any child to imitate or follow her instructions. Some children would involve in the activities, some were sitting and staring at the music teacher or ignoring music activities.

B. Caregivers' unstructured informal guidance music activities

Hope Daycare Center has three classes. Each of the three classes has 3 licensed caregivers. Every day the learning schedules were planned and discussed. According to researchers' observation and internship logs, there were many informal music learning activities. These activities allow the infants and toddlers to mix and mingle with music learning naturally.

The caregivers use instruments to make sound to ensure the infants and toddlers pay attention. The children would fix their eyes on the instruments and caregivers. Also, the caregivers would often change the lyrics of nursery rhymes to improve the level of communication and to enforce impression and memories. Moreover, the caregivers played music CD songs to inform children about the change of their scheduled activities. In order to help them to develop good learning habits, the daycare center arranges different work schedules in accordance with the age group. When changing the learning activities, the caregivers play music songs to remind infants and toddlers to prepare for the next event.

Research question 2: How did the Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns perform in the infants and toddlers' music learning environment in daycare center?

In this research study, there were 6 interns from SZMC allocated to the Hope Daycare Center. Through on-site observations, interviews, analysis and induction of internship logs, the 6 interns participated in the structured informal guidance music activities led by a music teacher and unstructured informal guidance music activities led by the caregivers. Here are the summaries:

- The interns have abilities to initiate various types of musical activities. These include participating in the sessions with the music teacher and the daycare center caregivers.
- The interns in the structured informal guidance activities participated in non-musical interactions with children. One of interns mentioned that she lacked familiarity with the music teacher's music plan; therefore, she turned her attention playing with the children instead.
- There has been a lack of confidence from the interns in their ability to perform music at the daycare center. The interns were all well trained but did not perform as well as expected.

- The interns were able to observe and learn from the music teacher at the structured informal guidance activities. Although the interns were not informed of the lesson plan beforehand, they were able to learn quickly on the spot and follow suit.
- There were two interns who did not get involved in the structured informal guidance music activities with the music teacher. They felt the music teacher's music lessons were exclusive; therefore, they had no role in the participation.
- When the caregivers were to start a music activity by playing a tune or singing a song, the interns will remind the children to pay attention.
- The interns imitated the caregivers' musical interactions or musical activities. Once the intern became familiarized with the routine of the daycare center, intern will initiate the change of classroom sessions by playing the routine CD.
- The interns will initiate music activities in the daily routines at the daycare center when the caregivers were busy. This is often done by changing the lyrics of some familiar nursery rhymes to encourage children's participation.
- The interns understand the importance of music activities in the interactions with infants and toddlers. However, it was less clear for the interns to understand some of the reasons for the caregivers' music interactions using certain methods even though these methods in practice could also be beneficial for children's music development.

Research question 3: What is the relationship of the Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns' musical training at their educational institution (SZMC) and their performance of music teaching at the daycare center?

The study consisted of six Early Childhood Care and Education Department interns at the Hope Daycare Center. These interns had the same music courses in college (SZMC) including keyboard music, percussion, movement, and children's instrumental music and teaching as well as passing piano test and final performance. Thus, all interns have the basic musical abilities such as singing, playing musical instruments, rhythm creation, body movement and music activity design. Following the review of our data, the relationship of interns' musical training at the college and their performance of music teaching at the daycare center are:

- The interns are knowledgeable with many instruments and performance techniques which they acquired at the college. This would equip them with the basic teaching tool to interact with infants and toddlers in both structured and unstructured informal guidance music activities.
- The interns had the opportunity to observe the daycare center caregivers' and music teacher's methods and style of music teaching. The music courses at the college allow them to gain the basic understanding of the teaching principles utilized by the caregivers and music teacher.
- The interns' musical skills are sufficient to use freely in the daycare center. They are proficient with many music activities and are able to modify the lyrics and songs to suit the teaching environment.
- The interns have had basic training in piano and singing accomplishment but they lack real-time experience in teaching. At the daycare center, there were no large music instruments such as piano; therefore, some of the intended activities which the interns could facilitate did not happen.

- There was a clear lack of confidence from the interns. They were worried since their performance at the daycare center was being marked and graded. Therefore, they were over-cautious, and some have decided not to participate in music activities.
- The interns all exhibited music teaching potentials, but they lack experience in leading and promoting music teaching to infants and toddlers. It was difficult for the interns to blend in the teaching group at the daycare center as they were unfamiliar with the routines and the center's teaching principle. As the result, some of the children had not concentrated well at the music lessons.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The conclusion from this study of allocating SZMC college interns to participate in the teaching of early music education at a government approved daycare center is as follow:

1. The internship experience allows the in-depth understanding of various music teaching components of daycare center in structured and unstructured informal guidance techniques. The interns were exposed to observational activities and participating in music lessons. The interns had the opportunity to observe a music teacher using teaching techniques from the United States to engage music in traditional methods and other related interactions. The teacher used body language and eye contacts with the infants and toddlers to make the teaching more effective. The daycare caregivers used planned and unplanned lessons for the children. This was effective in a sense of spontaneity and allows the infants and toddlers to learn in their natural environment.
2. Participating in the study, often the infants and toddlers would follow and imitate the instructors in their learning. It was also often observed that the infants and toddlers were attracted to a specific type of music and musical sound. There was also documentation of non-music-related interactions with the interns which include touching heads or holding hands. The interns often reminded the children about the presence of music and made the experience of music teaching more positive and engaging.
3. The interns have had four years of music trainings prior to be allocated to this teaching experience. They are all proficient with various instruments and teaching techniques. The interns were flexible and versatile in the daycare center. They blended well with the existing music teaching and were able to be independent at selecting their own teaching material. However, the lack of some large instruments at the daycare center, such as the piano, was a minor issue where the interns were not able to fully utilize their teaching potential. In addition, although the interns were well equipped with theory and teaching tools, it was observed that they lacked confidence at teaching and interaction with children. This was particularly evident in the early stage of attachment.

In our overview, the study took a step forward in the understanding of placing interns in a real-life working environment of a daycare center in Taiwan. This study allows us to further progress the possibility of early childhood education interns working in the daycare center along with daycare center caregivers and specialty appointed music teachers. Our conclusion has shown that it is a positive influence for the interns to learn from the placements with hands-on teaching experience. It is proven that for infants

and young children, music learning and exposure to it are at a most important stage of development. Therefore, it is important for the educators and policy makers to be made aware of the importance of having a proper learning environment and appropriate training for the care providers. Furthermore, from the intern perspectives, the experience allows the students to gain early teaching experience and environmental exposure. This also encourages self-reflection and independent learning. The author hopes this study will encourage educators, parents and early childhood care providers to further explore the endless possibility of improving early child music education in the future.

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