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## **Adapted action research as an instructional strategy in a music teacher education program in Hong Kong**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores how adapted action research could act as a catalyst for change in curriculum development and be used as an instructional strategy in a music teacher education program to enhance the reflective practice of student-teachers. Two cases of in-service part-time student-teachers of a music teacher program who conducted an individually adapted action research project are documented. Qualitative data was collected. Triangulation and discussion with participants were used to verify the findings. The findings indicate that teachers valued the enhanced opportunity for them not only to reflect and improve professional practice in teaching, but also to help their students to learn better. Teachers experienced positive classroom changes and developed ownership of their professional growth. Constraints noted include the lack of experience in action research at the beginning, and the lack of time for teachers to prepare curriculum materials, given their heavy workload of teaching.

Keywords: action research, music teacher education, case-study, teacher development, reflective practice

### **Introduction**

Action research is of increasing importance in teacher education programs, given its potential to address the professional needs of teachers to empower them to carry out sustainable reflective practice that creates better experiences in classroom instruction (Johnson 1995; Gilles et al. 2010). Many educators define action research in various ways. Ferrance (2000, 1) defines action research as “a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research”. Conway and Borst (2001, 3) defines it as a kind of “inquiry that is designed by teachers to make changes and affect teaching. A common model of action research is the spiral model. Stringer (2007, 8) describes it as an “interacting spiral” which consists of cycles of “look, think and act”. Mills (2011) describes it as a “dialectic action research spiral” where teacher-researchers spirally back and forth between data collection, analysis and a focus (p. 17). There may be several

cycles of focus-identification/data-collection/reflection/action to be done in a research.

Action research is found to be practical for preservice teachers to reflect on their classroom instruction (Auger and Wideman 2000). Some teacher educators advocate the use of the adapted action research approach, which consists of only one cycle of reflective practice for student-teachers in order to address the learning needs of student-teachers and motivate them to reflect on their teaching (Hermes and Zengerle 1999; Cain et al. 2007). No matter which model or approach of action research is used, the major value of it is in the change that occurs in practice of teaching rather than generalization to a wider public (Ferrance 2000).

In the field of music education, Bresler (1995) advocated the use of action research to improve “teaching and curriculum within a particular classroom” and help teacher/researcher to “reflect and change” (p. 15). Action research has been employed in exploring ways to integrate music in language teaching (Miller 1994), and experimenting instructional strategies of music composition in classroom settings (Miller 2004; Major 2007). According to the review of Cain (2008), action research in music education does not yet have “a substantial body of reports from any particular field within music education” and “most reports describe pragmatic attempts to improve practice locally” (Cain 2008, 309). Among the studies reviewed by Cain, there are very few studies on the use of action research in music teacher education, such as the development of reflective thinking of pre-service music teachers (Conway 2000), and student-teachers’ perceptions of fieldwork experience (Reynolds and Conway, 2003).

### **Contextual background**

#### ***Music teacher education programs in Hong Kong***

Music teacher education in Hong Kong is offered as one of the specializing subjects within teacher education programs at the initial teacher training level. There are various modes of

government-funded initial teacher education programs offered by universities and post-secondary institutions that lead to qualified teacher registration, such as PGDE (Postgraduate Diploma in Education), DE (Diploma in Education) or B.ED (Bachelor in Education). Student-teachers are required to complete a period of practicum in schools. The duration of full-time programs ranges from one to four years, while the duration of part-time programs ranges from two to three years. Full time PGDE, DE or B.ED music teacher education students must complete teacher education programs before working in schools as registered teachers. As schools in Hong Kong are allowed to employ teachers without teacher qualification, in-service teachers who have entered the teaching profession without any teacher qualification may study part time PGDE music teacher education programs to fulfil requirements for teacher registration. Teacher education programs at the Master and Doctoral levels are not funded by the government and do not lead to qualifications for teacher registration.

### ***Music curriculum for junior secondary schools in Hong Kong***

The consultation document *Learning to Learn – The Way Forward in Curriculum Development* guided the Hong Kong education reform in 2000 (CDC 2000). Under the curriculum reform, music has now become one of the three Arts Education Key Learning Area subjects. The new curriculum guide, *Music Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)* for children from ages 6 to 14, lays out a curriculum framework that focuses on performing, listening to and creating music. It encourages teachers to select a variety of materials when developing a student-centered school-based music curriculum to cater for students' diversified abilities and learning needs (CDC 2003). However, music teachers in Hong Kong have relied on textbooks with curriculum content focusing on Western classical music (Brand and Ho 1999). It would be a challenge for novice teachers or teachers without experience in curriculum design to develop a student-centered school-based music curriculum

according to the ideas of education reform in Hong Kong.

### ***Rationale for using adapted action research in music teacher education programs***

I, as the researcher in this study, have been involved in music teacher programs in Hong Kong for many years. My teaching and research interests have informed this research, in particular my reflections on the use of adapted action research as an instruction strategy in a music teacher education program. As a people-oriented music teacher educator (Wellington and Austin 1996), I believe that when music teachers find meaning and success in their work and discover ways to improve, they will enjoy teaching music in classrooms. In order to help teachers to transform limitations into strengths and develop their ownership of professional development, as well as develop successful experience in music teaching through reflective practice, I believe that teachers have to be encouraged and supported in their endeavours to implement action research in class for reflective purposes.

### **Purpose of study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the professional development experience of in-service student-teachers through engaging in adapted action research projects. It is hoped that this study will provide insights for music educators and music teacher educators to improve music teachers' professional development.

### **The research**

This study is designed as a dual case study that employs the qualitative method. Two cases of in-service secondary school music teachers are documented. Each teacher is given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Alice and Ben are young teachers in their twenties and have fewer than five years of teaching experience. Both of them have taught all Form One (Age 12-13) students in different secondary schools in Hong Kong. For the case studies, Alice selected a group of 36 students, while Ben chose a group of 38 students. They are in-service student-teachers recruited from a two-year part-time PGDE music teacher education program

through convenience sampling (Creswell 2005), and they agreed to share their experience through this study, joining the research on a voluntary basis. At the time of this research, they were in their final-year of studies, and were enrolled in a 20-contact-hour two-semester course which focused on reflective practices in music classroom instruction. They conducted an adapted action research project on their classroom music instruction.

This study was conducted in three stages. First, both teachers attended two three-hour seminars on how to design and conduct adapted action research in music classrooms. The focus of the seminars was to develop teachers' content and pedagogical content knowledge on reflective practice. I conducted interviews with each of them before the first seminar to solicit their expectations and experience of classroom research. Two monthly consultation meetings were held during this stage. The purpose of these meetings was to help them identify an issue or a problem that they would like to study for their action research so as to improve their own professional practice in music instruction.

During the second stage, the two teachers each implemented an adapted action research project in one of the music classes of their own choice. The duration of each project depended on the time needed for the teacher to carry out all planned experimental interventions. The time frame was five months. They had to record either verbal or written reflections of every lesson. Copies of students' work and teaching aids were kept. Excluding holidays, four monthly meetings were held during this stage in order to share the progress of their projects.

At the final stage, each teacher made a presentation to their peers on the findings of their projects. Individual interviews were conducted after their presentations to solicit participants' views about their experience of carrying out this adapted action research. All materials reported in this study were originally written in Chinese, and were then translated into English so that the experience of this study could be shared with a wider audience.

### **Data collection and analysis**

A standardized semi-structured interview guide was used for conducting face-to-face individual interviews with teachers. As mentioned, both teachers were asked to provide either verbal or written reflections of every lesson they had taught. I also kept my reflections after each meeting to document the developmental progress of my students' research projects. All interviews and reflections were recorded, transcribed and checked by both teachers before data analysis was carried out to ensure authenticity and credibility of research outcomes (Merriam 1998). Triangulation that included review of materials, such as teachers' curriculum design, teaching aids, school documents, teachers' record of work, and students' work, was also employed (Creswell 2005). I used these data as the basis for interviews and discussion with the teachers of this study in order to better understand their professional development throughout the period of their implementation of their adapted action research. The rationale of collecting all available information generated from the process of learning and teaching of the teachers of this study is to obtain a holistic view of the phenomenon emerged from this study (Sagor 2000). All data were coded, categorized and analyzed. Content analysis (Merriam 1998) and pattern matching (Yin 1994) were used as data procedures for this study. Quotations from interviews and reflections were extracted for presentation in findings.

### **Limitations**

As do all studies, this study also had some limitations.

- (1) Both teachers of this study taught all music classes of the same level in their schools. In order to lessen their workload, they only reported the research findings of one of the classes that they taught. The experience they shared and the observed phenomena were based on those selected classes.
- (2) In order to be fair to all students that the teachers of this study taught, the same materials and instructional strategies were used in other classes that were not selected for

reporting. Thus, a control group could not be implemented in both teachers' projects.

- (3) The major focus of this study is to document the professional development of in-service student-teachers through reflective practice. The ideas presented here are the subjective experiences of these teachers, as well as those of mine, rather than generalizations of the findings to all settings of the music teacher education program.

### **Analytical framework**

The analytical framework of this study is based on the theoretically interconnected model (TIM) of Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) and the curriculum making model (CMM) of Clayton (2007). According to the TIM, change occurs through teachers' 'mediating processes of reflection and enactment' in internal domains and the external domain (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002, 950). Internal domains include the (1) personal domain, which includes teacher knowledge, beliefs and attitudes; (2) domain of practice, which includes all forms of professional experimentation; and (3) domain of consequence, such as significant outcomes of students' learning. The external domain refers to sources of information, stimulus or support. Teachers' processes of reflection and enactment are essential in the change mechanisms among these domains. Change may occur in any one of these domains and may induce change in another. As an example, a teacher may reflect on the instructional strategies that have significant impact on students' learning; the domain of consequence is changed due to the change in instructional strategies. The personal domain is thus changed because of the teacher's successful experience gained through the change in instructional strategies. If this teacher shares his or her experience with colleagues, he or she becomes an agent of the external domain that induces change in other teachers' internal domains. The TIM provides an explanation for the interconnected change phenomenon of teachers' professional development.

Within the internal domains as stipulated in the TIM, Clayton's CMM enlightens



teachers' professional development by explaining the process of change through risk taking during curriculum making. Clayton (2007) regards curriculum making as a kind of professional development for teachers. The tension areas that teachers encounter in their daily classroom instruction include students' problems in learning, students' disinterest in the subject, and students' passiveness to participating in learning activities. Clayton regards curriculum making as a pivot from which teachers' professional development can result. It can help teachers to manage student relationships and to develop a sense of ownership of the curriculum. When teachers take practical risks in managing these tension areas through curriculum making, they can experience conceptual changes as well as improvement in practice.

The use of these two models in the theoretical construct can holistically explain the phenomenon of professional development of in-service music teachers documented in this study.

## **Findings**

### *Case 1*

Alice taught in School A, a government-funded secondary school with Chinese as the medium of instruction that was located in an urban area where most residents belonged to low-income families. According to Alice's description,

"The academic achievement of my students is not high and only very few of them could afford to have private lessons on any musical instruments. ... Although we [School A] offer them [students] a lot of extracurricular music activities, they are not too interested in music lessons. ... they are very passive in learning."

At the beginning of the course, Alice was worried about conducting her small scale adapted action research to improve her music curriculum design and instructional strategies. She found it difficult and was not sure whether the curriculum would work out or not.

"I worry whether I could conduct an action research in my music classes. I've never done any research before. I have to do everything from scratch; it's like stepping into a dark room. ... I'm a part time student; I'm very busy and usually occupied by my daytime teaching job. I have no idea what to do and have no confidence that I can do classroom research. ... I worry about my curriculum design and instructional strategies because I don't know whether it would work out or not."

Alice was quite lost when she had to find a focus for her action research project. She had extensive discussion with peers and me before she could decide on a topic that she really wanted to focus on. This was partly because she was used to teach according to a music textbook, and partly because she was more concerned about “what to teach” rather than “how to help students learn better.” She considered though that the monthly meetings were very useful and had helped her to design her research project.

“My students are weak in many areas. ...there are so many things in the textbook that I really want to teach them. ... when everybody (her peers) were brainstorming their topics, I felt that I was totally lost after knowing their plans. ... after brainstorming about what to do, I drafted my research plan. ... my supervisor and classmates provided me with professional support on the design and implementation of action research. ... monthly meetings were good because I could have enough time to prepare my work before I could come up with some progress in my project.”

Alice focused her project on how to improve her students’ listening skills of identifying tone colors of western orchestral instruments. She believed that continuous training can improve students’ musical skills. She designed a ten-lesson curriculum with ten sets of listening exercises. These ten lessons were scheduled once per week in ten consecutive weeks, excluding school holidays. Each set of listening exercises contained five musical excerpts. Each excerpt lasted from 30 seconds to 1.5 minutes.

“Maybe continuous training can help students to improve their listening skills in differentiating tone colors of western orchestral instruments. ... they won’t have so much chance to listen to that if I follow the content of the textbook. No matter whether they can improve or not, at least I have given them plenty of chance to learn how to listen. ...My students seldom had a chance to listen to classical music in their daily life. They won’t take initiative to listen to western classical music. ... I hope that this curriculum can develop their confidence and abilities in music listening.”

Alice played the excerpts and guided her students to differentiate the range, mechanisms of sound production and characteristics of tone colors of various western orchestral instruments. She played the excerpts repeatedly when her students could not answer her questions correctly. Her choice of topic and curriculum design demonstrated that she had found a middle ground between her beliefs about music teaching and the learning needs of her students.

“When students had difficulties to differentiate the tone colors of instruments, I had to play the excerpts again and again until most of them get it. ... I also play the excerpts again when I checked the answers with them. ... I think listening to the same excerpt repeatedly can help them to become more familiar with the sound of instruments.”

Alice used a listening test to compare students’ achievement in recognizing tone colours and a four-statement short questionnaire for soliciting students’ opinions about her strategic curriculum making. The listening test was used as pre- and post-tests which she administered twice to one group of Form One students before and after she implemented her curriculum. She found that the majority of her students, 32 out of 36 students, gained higher scores in the post-test which evidenced students’ improvement. The short questionnaire was administered after the implementation of the curriculum. The four statements of the questionnaire included: “I gained confidence in differentiating tone colors.” “I have improved in differentiating tone colors,” “Teachers’ guidance and the listening exercises were helpful in my learning process,” and “I like this listening curriculum.” She found that the majority of her students gained confidence, agreed that her strategic curriculum making had helped them to improve, and expressed that they liked it.

Alice gathered information about teaching and learning of every lesson. She was contented with her students’ progress. Her experience of knowing the weakness of the design in teaching aids helped her to become more aware of students’ learning needs and the importance of getting students’ feedback.

“In the past, I taught and never really knew how my students learned. ... I had to ask more questions because I wanted to get more feedback from them, ...this project has helped me to understand them more. ...I need to find ways to plan music curriculum according to their needs. Especially when I found out that my students did not understand some of my questions in one of the lessons. It’s a kind of communication ... their feedback guided me to adjust my expectation and improve my teaching aids. ...They consciously know that they had improvement in music listening and gained some confidence. This is what I’m really very happy to know about.”

Among the difficulties that Alice experienced during the process of doing her adapted action research project, time constraints was one of her biggest concerns.

“It was so time consuming to read related literature and to prepare for the project. I had to be very careful with the design of every instructional strategy and the selection of every piece of music that I’ve chosen for the teaching unit.”

From the perspective of findings ways to improve curriculum design and instructional strategy, Alice discovered alternative ways of teaching, and experienced success. She developed ownership of her professional growth and developed the courage to change.

“I feel very happy and successful because I have found an alternative way of teaching. ... I’ll certainly use this strategy to conduct listening activities in future. ... Though it’s risky to try something new, it worked well. This is my own professional development. I’ve read more books because of this action research. ... I’ve learned more, I’ve more confidence in doing classroom research, and I’ve improved in teaching. I can do it. ... It’s a catalyst to improve my curriculum planning and instructional strategy.”

During my supervision of Alice in conducting her adapted action research project, I noticed that she needed a lot of encouragement and needed to hear examples from her peers before she had the courage to start working on her own project. During the monthly meetings, she would prefer her project to be the last piece for discussion, and did not talk too much about her work in front of her peers. This shows that she did not have much confidence to share the process of her work with her peers. There were many times when she would wait until most of her peers had left and then seek individual advice from me. However, there were obvious changes when she had gathered sufficient evidence for reporting her students’ progress. At the presentation, she could not hide her joy of sharing her happiness about her students’ progress, and most of all, to let us know that her students liked her curriculum.

### *Case 2*

Ben taught in School B, a government-funded secondary school with Chinese as the medium of instruction, which is located in a suburban town area with a lot of public housing estates for low-income families. According to Ben,

“My students are not interested in music lessons at all. They don’t have patience to listen to music.”

Although Ben was a very cheerful teacher and was very concerned about students’ interests, he found it hard to identify a focus for his adapted action research project.

“I don’t know what to do for the action research project at the beginning. I won’t have so much time to read and to think about it. ... it’s difficult to find a topic that’s worth doing and make sense to me and my students.”

Ben was very eager to share his views and daily experience about teaching and learning with his classmates in the monthly meetings. He enjoyed meeting his classmates and could not wait to tell everybody about every joyful and meaningful snapshot of his teaching in school. He believed that it was important for music teachers to be cheerful and playful. He discovered the focus for his action research project through his experience sharing, and considered the monthly consultation meetings as a powerful drive for him to accomplish the action research project.

“I’m so busy and lonely in school. I needed somebody to talk to when I found myself losing directions in my busy teaching job. Other teachers won’t understand the needs of music teachers. They are too serious to be playful. Music teachers should not be like that. We have to be joyful so that our students can share the enjoyment of music. ... I love watching animation and I think kids like that too. ... They may love to know more about the background music of animation. ... The meetings helped me to narrow down to a clear focus and I could plan my action research more systematically.”

Ben wanted to find out whether audio-visual animation could help his students to improve their skills in analytical listening. He used excerpts of animations with classical music as background. Each excerpt lasted for approximately two minutes. He designed a four-lesson curriculum unit which aimed at guiding students to analyze musical elements of the excerpts taken from audio-visual animation. These musical elements included “tempo,” “meter,” “dynamics,” “tone colours,” “musical form” and “genre,” as stated in the *Music Curriculum Guide* (CDC 2003). He guided students to analyze the musical elements used in those excerpts. He explained how musical effects were created with various treatments of musical elements and related these excerpts to various historical styles of composition. These excerpts were played again upon students’ request.

“My students don’t have patience to listen to classical music. ... perhaps they can develop their patience of listening to classical music with the help of animation. ... I just want to see if they can improve in their analytical listening with the help of animation that they like.”

Ben used a listening test for assessing students’ achievement in analyzing specific musical elements in selected music excerpts, and a four-statement short questionnaire for soliciting students’ opinions about the use of audio-visual animations for analytical listening

activities. The listening test was used as pre- and post-tests which he administered twice to the one group of Form One students (n=38) before and after he implemented the curriculum unit. He found that the majority of his students showed improvement in analytical listening through using audio-visual animations: 19 students improved, 12 students maintained the same score, while 7 students had lower marks. The four statements of the questionnaire were: “The use of audio-visual animations can raise my motivation of learning analytical listening skills,” “Audio-visual animations can help me to improve in analytical listening,” “I like audio-visual animations to be used in music lessons,” and “I like listening to music without audio-visual animations.” His students indicated that audio-visual animations were attractive teaching aids that could arouse their interest and motivation to learn and help them to improve in analytical listening; this was evident because they did not like to listen without audio-visual animations.

Ben found that his students became very attentive when the use of audio-visual animations guided them in analytical listening activities. He experienced better interaction with students during curriculum implementation and found that his students were more interested and participatory in the learning progress. The most rewarding experience was the meaningful interaction between his students and him during the process of teaching and learning.

“At first, I wasn’t sure whether audio-visual animations could help them. Animations are always attractive. It aroused their interests and made them more attentive to what I taught. This is the first step to improve their learning progress. However, I think that audio-visual animations might not help students to understand musical elements so much without my guidance. ... I put a lot of effort to interact with students when I implement the curriculum unit. ... In the past, I seldom think about the importance of teacher-student interaction. Theoretically, I know it, but now I practically realize that it’s so important. I enjoyed the moment when students’ response were so good.”

When Ben accounted his experience of doing adapted action research, he reflected that he had improved in his teaching and curriculum planning. Although he considered the time and effort spent on the design of curriculum and preparation of audio-visual teaching aids as a major difficulty for conducting his project, it became worthwhile when he taught without

problems and received valuable feedback from his students regarding the improvement in his teaching. He viewed this adapted action research project as a success for himself and his students.

“I think it (action research) is a kind of instructional strategy for my own professional learning. It made me think carefully about my teaching and curriculum planning. Through preparing the curriculum materials for the action research project, I’ve learned how to be more systematic in curriculum planning. ...Because I need to take note of my students’ progress for reporting ..., get feedback from them ..., now I realize that there’s a bigger chance for students to achieve if I plan the curriculum more carefully. It made my teaching more meaningful. ... honestly speaking, it’s very time consuming to read, to design this curriculum unit and to prepare these teaching aids when I’m so occupied by so many school duties. ... my hard work paid off when it made my teaching more fluent. ... I’m very contented with my students’ progress and improvement. It’s so rewarding ... for me and my students.”

According to my experience of supervising Ben, his cheerful character and his enthusiastic attitude in helping students to learn music joyfully helped him design his music curriculum with interesting materials. His willingness to share experiences facilitated a smooth exchange of ideas in the monthly meetings that helped him and his classmates in the design and implementation of action research projects. His ideas about learning music joyfully, as well as his fruitful experience of interacting with students, were encouraging and valuable to everybody in his class.

## **Discussion**

### ***Stimulus in external domain***

This study showed two cases of in-service music teachers who conducted adapted action research as a part of the course requirement of a music teacher education program. Alice and Ben both experienced a stage of uncertainty and risk-tasking when they planned their projects. They found it hard to frame a research focus to address their professional needs. In the case of Alice, she needed continuous encouragement before she acquired the courage to work on her own project. Although Ben was very cheerful and enthusiastic in teaching and experience sharing, he needed professional support from peers and me that was regarded as professional support from music teachers who understood the needs of teaching and learning music. Both Ben and Alice needed extensive discussions to funnel their ideas before they

could frame their research questions.

Through the process of experience sharing and voicing reflections on teaching and learning, teachers of this study were involved in deep reflection of student learning that affected their curriculum design and teaching. According to the TIM, conducting adapted action research with continuous professional support can be regarded as stimulus in the external domain (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002), which provides impetus for teachers to develop reflective practice, and thus use reflection as a means for reporting professional development.

### *Change in domain of practice*

As the focus of the adapted action research was on improving teaching with emphasis on student learning, the main fabric for reflection was student learning. Similar to the phenomenon of the CMM (Clayton 2007), risk taking in the process of designing curriculum and preparing materials brought new experiences to these teachers. They had to relate their curriculum planning to student learning, and experiment with alternative ways of curriculum design and instruction to address their students' interests and learning needs, with the intention to solve tension areas in their classroom music instruction. This marked an important shift from a focus on teacher-self to a focus on students that evidenced a major progress in professional development.

In addition to the shift in focus, both teachers of this study realized the importance of getting feedback from students through student-teacher interaction. Alice expressed that she adjusted her expectations of her students and improved her teaching aids according to students' feedback. Ben realized the practical importance of incorporating interactive learning activities in the music curriculum when he found it useful for understanding students' progress. They gained insights from students' feedback for improving their curriculum, materials and teaching. They developed a sense of ownership of the curriculum



experiment, and demonstrated change through curriculum making, as according to the CMM (Clayton 2007). These positive experiences that Alice and Ben had in classroom instruction changed their domain of practice according to the TIM (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002).

### ***Change in domain of consequence***

In order to help Alice and Ben reflect on their students' learning, they used student assessment, classroom student-teacher interaction and questionnaires as reference points for reflection on their teaching. They could reflect on students' process of learning and their learning outcomes. This was a way to make the qualities of reflection visible (Ward and McCotter 2004). They were satisfied with their students' learning progress and improvement. Alice was happy to know about her students' improvement in music listening, as well as their enhanced confidence and interests in music learning. Ben felt contented with his students' improvement in analytical listening and motivation through the use of interesting audio-visual animations. Students' improvement and progress in music learning demonstrated change in the domain of consequence that was induced by the change in the domain of practice according to the TIM (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002).

### ***Change in personal domain***

Alice had a lot of worries and doubt when she started to plan for her adapted action research. It took her several months to build up her confidence to support her change in curriculum planning and instruction through collecting evidence and feedback from students. Alice developed ownership of her professional growth and gained confidence through accomplishing her adapted action research project. Similarly, Ben had difficulties to focus his project at the beginning and found it hard to prepare curriculum materials for the project. He discovered the importance of student-teacher interaction that helped his students learn better with his careful curriculum design with interesting materials. He regarded his adapted action research project as a success for himself and his students. Both teachers developed the

courage to change in teaching and learning, which was demonstrated in a change in their attitudes towards conducting adapted action research and their improved knowledge in curriculum planning and classroom research (within the personal domain of the TIM). As they experienced success through conducting the adapted action research project to help students to learn better with the alternative curriculum that they experimented with, their personal domain of the TIM (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002) changed correspondingly. These changes came as a result of their changes in curriculum according to the CMM (Clayton 2007) which lies within the domain of practice, as well, as the change in the domain of consequence of the TIM (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002).

### **Conclusion**

From the perspective of a music teacher educator, it is always a challenge to educate student-teachers to conduct meaningful reflective practice to improve teaching and learning. It is particularly challenging for in-service student-teachers to conduct reflective practice. While they pursue their part-time PGDE program, they are immersed in the school education system with pressures of achievement-oriented curriculum, education reform, teaching and administration duties, and daily classroom management problems. It is not an easy task for them to develop their reflective practice while surviving under these conditions. According to the professional development experience of the two teachers of this study, time constraint was a major difficulty that they had to overcome. Similar to the worries of Cain et al. (2007, 103), that the “first encounter with action research may be a disappointment or even failure”, I provided continuous professional support for the student-teachers of this study with the intention to minimize the possible difficulties that they might encounter in the process of conducting their small-scale adapted action research. The findings of this study illustrated that adapted action research can be used as an instructional strategy to complement a formal music teacher education program to bring about meaningful professional development

experiences for in-service music student-teachers. It can act as a catalyst for change that belongs to the external domain of the TIM (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002). It can be used as a tool to nurture curiosity for teachers to search for ways to improve teaching and learning through risk taking in curriculum making according to the CMM (Clayton 2007), which could cause changes in the internal domains of the TIM (Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002).

Incorporating adapted action research project that involves continuous professional support may incur a substantial workload of music teacher educators. However, such effort is worthwhile when it helps music teacher education students to become reflective practitioners who develop ownership of their own professional development.

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