CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parent–teacher partnerships in group music lessons: a collective case study

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Abstract

Developing effective parent–teacher relationships in music lessons is important for the well-being and learning outcomes of the learners. The aim of this collective case study was to explore the relationship between teachers and parents of pre-school children in group music lessons in the Klang Valley, which is an area in West Malaysia centred on Kuala Lumpur. It includes the neighbouring cities and towns in the state of Selangor. Interviews were conducted with nine parents and three teachers of three group music classes for pre-school children. The results point to the values and attitudes that parents and teachers hold and the interactions between them that both encouraged and discouraged parent–teacher partnerships, which are relationships where trust, reciprocity, mutuality, shared goals and decision making are essential characteristics.

Introduction

Developing effective parent–teacher relationships can have an important impact on the well-being and learning outcomes of the children who take instrumental lessons, both in one-on-one and in group settings. Relationships can be complex in one-on-one lessons, but in a group setting another dimension is arguably added to the complexity of parent–teacher relationships through the added social and emotional aspects (Pitt & Hargreaves, 2016). The existing research on parent–teacher relationships in a non-musical context recurrently suggests that parents and teachers typically view themselves as partners in education (e.g. Lueder, 2000; McGrath, 2007; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). This article investigates a wide range of factors that have either encouraged or discouraged the formation of parent–teacher partnerships within the context of group music lessons in private settings in West Malaysia.

Various attitudes and behaviours may encourage the formation of teacher–parent partnerships. In a study ranking the key characteristics of effective partnership between parents and professionals, trust was ranked as the highest followed by mutual respect, open communication and honesty (Dunst, Trivette & Johanson, 1994; Keen, 2007). Furthermore, Rouse and O'Brien (2017) emphasise that parent–teacher partnerships have been included in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) – a key policy document in Australia – which describes these partnerships as:

> a relationship where parents and educators value each other's contribution to, and role in, the child's life, as well as valuing the knowledge that each has of the child. It is a relationship based on mutual trust and shared decision making and where each person can communicate freely and respectfully with each other and share insights and perspectives about each child. (DEEWR, 2009, p. 12)

Rouse and O'Brien (2017) conclude that 'notions of mutuality and reciprocity create a context in which both parent and teacher are equal participants' (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017, p. 51). Further aspects of reciprocity in parent–teacher partnerships include both parties being involved in every aspect of the children's learning and well-being by acting as advisors, educators, supporters and advocates in collaborative partnerships (Swick, 1991; Swap, 1993; Lueder, 2000; Rouse, 2012; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Furthermore, the quality of parent–teacher partnerships becomes evident in the level of interpersonal communication, where effective two-way communication channels have to be developed between the parties in order to convey parents' expectations, ambitions and designs for their children (Chrispeels, 1988; Hallam, 2006; Lueder, 2000; Swap, 1993) as well as the teachers' updates and instructions for home practice.

These kinds of partnership relationships have been observed to result in better engagement, learning, motivation, attitude towards school work, achievement and higher-quality homework, resulting in increased learning outcomes for the child (Lueder, 2000; Creech & Hallam, 2003; Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Cooper and Hedges (2014) cite an example of the collaborative response of a child's teachers and family to his interest in drumming leading to his musical rhythm, accuracy and performance skills being enhanced. From the above, it appears that the formation of partnerships between parents and teachers will most likely have a positive impact on children's development and learning experience.

Despite these positive effects, a number of relational dynamics can also discourage the formation of partnerships. Parent–teacher relationships in non-musical contexts show that parents and teachers often feel misunderstood and not appreciated by each other, resulting in situations where partnerships are not easily forged (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Miretzky, 2004; Serpell & Mashburn, 2012; Sheridan et al., 2012; Vincent, 2004). Consequently, communication in order to understand each other's points of view is essential (Miretzky, 2004). This research suggests that parents and teachers may face conflict in the areas of role expectations and parental involvement as a result of an overall lack of mutuality in understanding and appreciation as well as an absence of open communication.

In music education literature the issues of parent–teacher partnerships have been explored in the areas of parental involvement (Davidson et al., 1996), parent–teacher–pupil relationships (Creech & Hallam, 2003) and teacher–pupil relationships (Carey & Grant, 2015). Previous research on this topic has mainly been located in the United Kingdom and United States. Part of the uniqueness of this study is its West Malaysian context, where family dynamics and cultural practices are arguably different from those in the West. For example, the first author's experience in the Malaysian context suggests that parental involvement may mean fetching the child to and from the class and paying the fees and having an occasional discussion with the teacher on the progress of their children. In contrast, the research literature typically assumes greater interest and interaction between parent, teacher and pupil. A considerable number of students take music lessons in a one-on-one or group setting at private music schools, with private music teachers or at private international schools in order to learn to play an instrument (Abdullah, 1990; Cheah, 2012; Ross, 2002). Although very little research exists on music education in West Malaysia, UK-based music examination boards, such as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and Trinity College London (TCL), have a prominent presence as the number of candidates who enrol for these examinations is sizeable. The only figures available are from a study by Ross (2002) in which she states that based on anecdotal evidence some 28,000 Malaysian candidates sat for the ABRSM practical examinations in 1997. Malaysia is currently the fourth-largest centre in the world for ABRSM music examinations, following the UK, Hong Kong and China.[1] In addition, Malaysia is the second-largest centre in the region for TCL music examinations, following India.[2] It could be concluded that a vast majority of music education in private settings is examination driven. Fewer students are involved in group music lessons than in the one-on-one setting. However, it is common to have group music lessons for pre-school children in private settings in West Malaysia. Most music lessons in West Malaysia do not involve parents to a large extent

except for early childhood music lessons offered at private music centres such as Yamaha and Opus Music Academy, among others.

There is also a lack of literature in music education research on parent–teacher partnerships in West Malaysia. This lack of discussion on parent–teacher partnerships could be the result of prevailing parent–teacher perspectives in the Malaysian context, where it is often assumed that the teacher is the expert and the parent is a supporter who is learning together with the child. Parents and teachers are thus not viewed as having an equal footing: parents should be involved but not on an equal basis. A few studies have examined interpersonal dynamics, attitudes, harmony and discord between parents and teachers in instances where the student is taking one-on-one lessons (Creech & Hallam, 2003; Macmillan, 2004). Creech and Hallam (2009) mention 'the potential for parents and teachers to reframe their modes of relating within learning partnerships' (p. 2). In this article, we aim to explore the potential ways in which this may be realised.

Method

The current article reports on a collective case study that explores the relationships between parents and teachers by investigating the various ways in which they describe their relationships that are formed around three different group music classes within private settings in West Malaysia. The theoretical definitions of partnership in parent–teacher relationships frame the ways that relationships are understood in the study.

Parental roles change as children age, and parents of young children are typically still involved with their activities. It is also more common in West Malaysia to find group music classes for pre-school children than for school-going children. The first case is an early childhood group music class introducing basic musical skills to infants below 12 months of age, where it is compulsory for parents to participate in the class. The second case is a group music class encouraging movement to music for toddlers with special needs, also requiring parental participation. The third case is a group class teaching aural skills and initial keyboard playing skills to children between the ages of 5 and 6, where parental attendance is not essential. It was assumed that parent–teacher relationships in all three cases would be similar enough for comparison, even though there are some differences between the children in the group music classes.

Participants

A total of 13 participants took part in the study. The participants included the three teachers of the group music classes, and three parents from each of the classes.[3] Participants were selected by purposeful sampling (Stake, 1995). The teachers were selected based on their experience and their ability to communicate about their teaching experiences and relationships with the parents of their pupils. The parents were referred by the teachers and were selected on the basis of varying levels of parental involvement with the teachers. In addition, these parents are articulate and sufficiently extrovert to be able to describe their relationships with the teachers of their children openly. In keeping with the ethical principles of treating the participants with dignity and respect, all participants invited to take part in the study were fully informed of the research before agreeing to complete letters of informed consent and assent.

Procedure

In order to explore the various ways that parents and teachers describe their relationships, the perspectives of the parents and the teachers were ascertained in two qualitative semi-structured interviews. The first inquired about the participants' understandings and experiences of parent–teacher relationships. The questions in the first interview were related to parent–teacher relationships in the group music lesson context. The second interview made use of four factional stories (Kallio, 2015) as a means of facilitating discussion. Kallio (2015) explains that 'factional stories may be understood as a bricolage

of previously collected data, analyses and fictive elements, combining research participants' and researcher voices and presented as a short story' (p. 3). The factional stories were generated from information gathered from a focus group interview with six music teachers, which did not include the three teachers of the group music classes. In the focus group, the teachers described their experiences, both positive and negative, of parent–teacher relationships. The factional stories thus include both group and one-on-one scenarios, drawing on the experiences of the teachers who were part of the focus group. Since the factional stories were intended to provoke value-based responses, both scenarios were included. However, in the interviews conducted for this study the factional stories often resulted in comparisons between one-on-one and group situations, especially by teachers. These comparisons are included in the results of this study as they provide insight into the experiences of the teachers. Data gathered from the 24 interviews were transcribed and coded using values coding (Saldaña, 2016) in Atlas.ti. In order to ensure participants' anonymity, we have assigned pseudonyms to them. The teachers are given pseudonyms beginning with 'T', and the parents' pseudonyms begin with 'P'.

Results

Results are presented based on the responses of the parents and teachers to questions on the nature of their relationships, which were formed around group music lessons in West Malaysia. These emergent themes are discussed later under the headings of the values of parent–teacher relationships, attitudes of parents and teachers and interactions between parents and teachers.

Values of parents–teacher relationships

Trust and respect

Both parents and teachers cited trust and respect as two key values for successful parent–teacher relationships. Furthermore, it is evident from the parents' perspectives that the presence of these values would naturally lead them to appreciate the teachers. Pui Li stated that she would carefully select the teacher and then trust her implicitly. She also stressed the importance of showing trust for the teacher by not interfering in her children's lessons so as not to demotivate the teacher. Prisha had a religious slant on the importance of giving great respect to the teacher according to her Hindu religion. Prisha stated that 'we must follow these four people's orders: mother, father, teacher – the third person is teacher – then only god'. In responding to the factional story on the poor behaviour of the parent who was late for the group music class and was also rude to the teacher, Peggy and Pamela felt that it was important for parents to show respect by being punctual for the lesson and being polite in communicating with the teacher.

Similarly, teachers also spoke of the importance of having the parents' trust and respect. Tina maintained that if there is trust, all the problematic issues will be resolved.

> I still believe in the teacher–parent relationship. I see the one word that is most important in, in, in . . . you know, in our relationship is 'trust'. I always ask the parents who have a lot of these complaints or issues with us, . . . just one question: 'Do you trust me? If you trust me then you leave it to me'. Then I will do my best [for] that child.

These perspectives on trust and respect resonate with views in the literature. Miretzky (2004) states in her study on parent–teacher perspectives on their relationships in democratic schools that in recent years research has started to record the importance of the reciprocity of respect and trust in successful schools. She argues that for the betterment of the child, it is important that such trust is not misplaced and there is mutual respect for each other as individuals and for each other's perspectives.

Appreciation

Parents felt that appreciation of teachers would lead to good bonding between parents and teachers. Pamela believed it was necessary to appreciate her son's teacher by giving her gifts on teachers' day and Christmas as a means of building the relationship between them. One of the teachers, Tricia, expressed a similar sentiment in commenting that she felt good bonding with the parents as the parents were 'very considerate and very grateful' for her efforts in training their children. She added that a parent had baked a banana cake for her, which made her feel that her work was worthwhile. Another form of appreciation was seen in Pei Ting recommending the teacher to other parents as she was pleased with the teacher's efforts in teaching her children. This was beneficial for the teacher in terms of her image and financial standing.

These findings indicate that in the investigated group settings, parent and teacher perspectives focus on trust, respect and appreciation solely for the teacher. Similarly, a study by McGrath (2007) on power, trust and partnerships in relationships between mothers and teachers in a child-care centre found that the perspectives of the parents differed from those of the teachers. It emerged that that the mothers 'looked to the teachers to provide them with information about their children, which bolstered their trust in the centre and made them feel connected to their child's experience', while the 'teachers were less invested in trusting parents, and they appeared relatively unaware of how much power they had in their interactions with parents' (p. 1401). This finding reinforces the perspective that parents had a high regard for the teachers as they trusted them but the teachers did not have a reciprocal regard for the parents.

Distrust and disrespect

There were also instances of negative parental values, which clearly discouraged partnerships between parents and teachers. From the participants' responses to the factional stories and the teachers' recounted experiences with parents, it was apparent that some parents in one-on-one settings displayed negative values of distrust and disrespect, resulting in unreasonable and demanding behaviour towards the teachers. This is in direct contrast to the parents in the group setting, who showed trust, respect and appreciation to the teachers. Tricia recounted an unpleasant experience with a demanding and unrealistic parent of her pupil in a one-on-one class, who insisted on her child passing a higher grade each year. Tricia expressed great frustration at the parent's unreasonable demands, which clearly showed a lack of trust in her as an educator. She also added that the parent had just 'killed' her child's interest. Moreover, Tricia described unrealistic parents as those who 'tend[ed] to compare [their kids] with other parents' kids'. Tina also experienced a lack of trust from a demanding parent of her pupil in a one-on-one setting, in that the parent was always checking on her child's progress in terms of examinations and certification. Tina elaborated that it put a further strain on her relationship with her pupil that could possibly cause the child to hate playing the piano.

Parents had similar perspectives in responding to the factional stories on negative experiences that music teachers had with parent–teacher relationships. Pui Li commented that the parents can display disrespect by becoming a 'kind of bully – bullying the teacher'. Prisha added that such disrespectful behaviour towards the teacher could become a form of 'mental torture for the teacher'. Phoebe commented that the parents could even be 'rude' towards the teacher, clearly showing a lack of respect.

Although this study was on the group context, respondents' responses included experiences in the one-on-one context, which are included because it sheds perspectives on relationships between parents and teachers in a broader sense. These findings imply that there is a need for clearer understanding of the respective values of parents and teachers in one-on-one music lessons in West Malaysia as these values of distrust and disrespect towards teachers reduce the potential of forming parent–teacher partnerships. These findings also highlight the values of some Asian parents

who equate their children's musical achievements with boosting their status in society as the children brought honour to the family (Ross, 2002). In a US study on the childrearing perspectives of mothers from immigrant Chinese and European American communities, Chao (1995) found that Chinese parents felt 'that achieving academic excellence is the primary way for a child to honour his or her family and do well for the family' (p. 343). There is a strong similarity with values held by some parents in this study on the importance of the family.

Attitudes of parents and teachers

In the group music lesson context teachers emphasised the importance of parents being cooperative with them, whereas parents stressed the importance of being comfortable with teachers. It could be inferred that these attitudes would encourage parent–teacher partnerships.

Being Cooperative

In describing an exemplary group music lesson, Teresa indicated that the cooperation of the parents was most important for the success of the lesson. Furthermore, Teresa felt that in order to get parents to cooperate, it was necessary to develop the relationship with them to the level that they felt connected with her and were able to relate well with her as the teacher.

> They [parents] also need that connection with you and once they feel at home with you, I think it's magical. And you don't need to tell them to co-operate with me.

However, from another teacher's perspective, an exemplary lesson could be achieved only when the hierarchy of the triangular relationship between the teacher, parent and pupil is in place. Tina described the teacher as being at the top with the parent and pupil on either end of the triangle. This finding implies that in order to have a perfect lesson, the teacher would need the cooperation of the parent and the pupil as she directs the lesson. It is also obvious from this finding that this teacher viewed herself as an expert in her field and did not regard parents as equal partners in educating the child, but as supporters in their child's education. Therefore, for this teacher cooperation meant compliance to her instructions as opposed to developing the partnership with the parent. Teachers valued parents who were cooperative with them, as they felt that this enabled them to educate their children in an optimal manner.

In contrast, Teresa also shared her experience of an uncooperative parent in a one-on-one setting. The parent refused to buy the instrument and the musical scores for her daughter and instead ended up arguing with Teresa. This evidently could not result in educating the child in an optimal manner, as the situation was fraught with challenges in the initial stage of getting the fundamental materials required for the child to study the instrument. Cooperation seemed to be more prevalent in the group settings we investigated. However, there were different expectations around cooperation between parents and teachers.

Feeling Comfortable

For parents, it was important to have the positive attitude of feeling comfortable with the teachers. This attitude augurs well for developing a partnership between parents and teachers. Pui Li stated that she is 'very much at ease with her'. Patricia attempts to have some time to catch up with the teacher just before the class. Pamela makes a point of meeting with the teacher weekly after the class for a 'chit-chat' in order to develop the relationship between them to a more comfortable level.

However, some teachers did not feel comfortable with the parents in the one-on-one setting. Tricia and Tina felt uncomfortable with parents who kept cancelling their children's classes or

whose children kept missing their lessons deliberately. Both the teachers felt that the parents had taken advantage of them by asking for replacement lessons despite knowing that the parents or their children were at fault in missing the lessons. It is clear that these parents were being both unfair and calculating, which are negative attributes in attempting to build a sound parent–teacher partnership and a common cause of strained relationships between parents and teachers. This finding shows that relationships in West Malaysia can be customer-centric, where the teacher views the parent as a customer and the parent views the teacher as an entrepreneur. This is different from other literature on parent–teacher relationships in music education, where relationships are typically viewed in the context of instrumental learning rather than as transactions (Creech & Hallam, 2003, 2009; Macmillan, 2004). In contrast, parents and teachers in the group context did not describe any instances of such conflict.

Interactions between parents and teachers

In the group music lesson context parents stressed the importance of collaborating with the teachers, whereas teachers encouraged cooperation from the parents. Both parents and teachers found it helpful to have the parents supervise the children at home and to have open communication with each other.

Collaboration

Positive interactions in parent–teacher relationships found in group music settings include parents viewing themselves as collaborators with the teachers of their children, being entrusted to supervise their children at home and having open communication with the teachers. Parents had a range of perceptions of what collaboration means. Pang sees himself as a co-coordinator with the teacher, putting her instructions into effect during his child's class. It is also apparent that he sees himself as a collaborator in taking the initiative to videotape the class as a means of giving positive feedback to the teacher on his child's class. He believes it would help her in planning the subsequent classes.

The majority of parents who responded see their collaboration with the teacher as helping to maintain an environment conducive to effective teaching in the class by not allowing their children to fuss during the lesson, participating actively throughout the class in order to follow the teacher's instructions and giving the teacher their full cooperation during the class in order not to discourage the teacher. Patricia stated that she believes in collaborating with the teacher in order for her child to enjoy the full benefit of the class and make good progress. It appears that the difference between the perspectives of parents on collaboration may be due to their various backgrounds and skill sets; for instance, Pang took a macro view of the situation during the lessons and thought of how to improve the effectiveness of the classes by videotaping the lessons, whereas the remaining parents were more concerned about ensuring that the lessons ran smoothly without disruption.

This finding appears to be one-sided, as only the parents view themselves as collaborators, whereas the teachers merely regard the parents as being cooperative in educating the child. Literature suggests that both parties see the education of the child as a shared responsibility through actions such as collaborating, planning, communicating and evaluating, and where the partners are on an equal footing (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Lueder, 2000; Swick, 1991, 1992). The data discussed here seem to suggest this is not happening perhaps because such collaborations are not easily forged (Miretzky, 2004). Furthermore, literature suggests that in an ideal situation such collaborations will result in positive student achievement (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) as well as greater satisfaction in the relationships between parents and teachers (Comer, 1988; Swap, 1993). But it is apparent that teachers lack formal training in collaborating effectively with parents (Houston & Williamson, 1993; Radcliffe, Malone & Nathan, 1994;

Shartrand et al., 1997). This is the case despite Swick's (1991) assertion that collaboration is the core of parent–teacher partnerships.

Parental supervision of home practice

A further aspect of parents' interactions with teachers is that parents feel that they are entrusted by teachers to supervise their children's musical development. Prisha was particularly enthusiastic about the updates the teacher would post on the WhatsApp chatroom she had formed for the parents, giving detailed instructions on how to practise with their children. Prisha stated that the teacher 'will update us how to play the song. So, she will ask us to [do it] . . . really detailed, very detailed'. Tina expected parents to be practice supervisors but understood her role to be encouraging cooperation from the parents rather than as an equal collaboration.

In contrast, it was also evident that there is a lack of interaction between parents and teachers, which does not promote the quest for parent–teacher partnerships. Teachers complained of negative interactions with parents in the one-on-one context, where it was fairly common for parents not to interact with the teachers, but to treat them as baby-sitters instead. Teresa bemoaned the fact that these parents appear not to want to know about their child's progress, as they would never ask her anything about it. Furthermore, she felt that 'it's just like we are baby-sitting for you. . .' as the parents would frequently come an hour later than the appointed time to collect their child. Another teacher, Tricia, agreed with Teresa, saying 'usually these are the parents who leave [their children] there for you to babysit'. However, this was not the experience of the teachers in the group context because the children were pre-schoolers. Therefore, the parents either had to participate during the lessons or had to meet with the teacher soon after each lesson for an update on their children's progress.

Open communication

Parents and teachers stressed the importance of open communication between both parties, which will clearly impact on the quality of parent–teacher partnerships. Research has described the importance of communication as a bridge leading to more effective parent–teacher partnerships and encouraging greater parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Keyes, 2000). Both parents and teachers had a range of perceptions of what communication means. Parents in this study were particularly appreciative of teachers who kept their communication helpful, clear, considerate and professional. Peggy explained that communication in parent–teacher relationships is helpful, 'because like when we talk to the teachers we know their motives, their passion. We basically know their objectives, like what they do in school, how they run school and all'.

Peng Li concurred, stating:

> If we do not communicate with the teachers, and we don't understand what they are doing, and we just fetch our kids from the class every day, it is time-consuming, and we are spending our money too. We also need to know [about] our child's progress.

Tricia had a similar perspective that it is helpful to have regular communication between parents and teachers, as 'it's important to find out what's going on and find a way round it'. Teresa was of the opinion that communication is helpful, as it was important 'to discuss [an issue] with the mother or the father, or both of them'. Tina stated that she encouraged parents to talk openly with her in order for her to 'understand their problem'. Miretzky (2004) is of the opinion that it is vital for parents and teachers 'to talk to each other and share their worlds' (p. 842) in order to address and resolve problems. Chrispeels (1988) advocates that schools should contact parents frequently in order to build efficient bridges for parents to communicate with the teachers and administrators about their expectations, ambitions and designs for their child and for the school.

On the other hand, respondents discussed an instance of negative interaction in communication in parent–teacher relationships that does not reflect open communication. In one of the factional stories in a one-on-one context a teacher had merely sent a text message on an important issue, instead of speaking to the parent personally. This action offended the parent and led to a breakdown in communication, where the parent no longer wished to communicate with the teacher. Tricia commented that the resultant 'breakdown in communication' occurred arguably because 'the tone of the text message could have been misunderstood'. Teresa felt that the teacher was clearly in the wrong for approaching such a delicate situation in this manner. Both teachers and parents showed a preference for face-to-face communication.

A further reason for a lack of communication between parents and teachers was that some parents spoke a different language, especially in their homes, or had a different cultural background from the teacher. Most teachers teach musical terminology in English, but speak in a mixture of English, Mandarin or Chinese dialects while teaching, and some parents only speak in Mandarin or in a different Chinese dialect from the teacher. Keyes (2000) highlights the parental perspective that language differences may prove a hindrance to openness between parents and teachers, as the parent may feel uncomfortable if she is unable to communicate with the teacher in her own language.

Conclusions

These data contribute uniquely to an understanding of parent–teacher partnerships and the differences in these partnerships between one-on-one and group music classes. For the most part, parents in group classes seem to have adopted values of respect, trust and appreciation, and in general an attitude of being comfortable with teachers and collaborating with them. In contrast, teachers only emphasised the importance of parents having an attitude of being cooperative. Both parents and teachers endorsed parental supervision of home practice and confirmed that open communication was important; however, there were different views on what these behaviours entailed. Considering that numerous researchers point out that partnerships embody trust, reciprocity, mutuality, embracing collaboration, planning, evaluating, being on an equal footing and having two-way communication channels (Chrispeels, 1988; Christenson, 2004; Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Rouse, 2012; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017), it can be concluded that the parent–teacher relationships studied in these cases in West Malaysia should not be viewed as partnerships as yet. While this study has highlighted that in a group setting, parent and teacher perspectives focus on the need for trust, respect and appreciation of the teacher, it has also shown that these relationships may lack mutuality and reciprocity in sharing insights, perspectives, decision making, collaborating, planning and evaluating in relation to the well-being and learning outcomes for the children. This may be owing to the common perception of the Malaysian parent that these areas are the teachers' responsibility as the teacher is the best person to handle these aspects of the children's well-being and learning. Therefore, the parents' involvement is limited to coordinating with the teacher, helping to maintain a conducive environment for effective teaching and assisting the teacher by caring for their children and participating during the group music lessons.

In providing comparisons of parent–teacher relationships, the findings also highlight a difference between these relationships in the group and in one-on-one contexts. For example, the distrust and disrespect towards teachers, as seen in some one-on-one settings, do not contribute to the formation of parent–teacher partnerships. Furthermore, in the group music lesson context, teachers emphasised the importance of parents being cooperative with them, whereas in a one-on-one setting some parents could be uncooperative or calculating, resulting in strained relationships between parents and teachers. This finding also shows that relationships can be customer-centric, where the teacher views the parent as a customer and the parent views the teacher as an entrepreneur. In addition, in the group music lesson setting, parents view themselves as collaborators, whereas in a one-on-one context, it was not uncommon for parents not to interact with the teachers but to treat them as

baby-sitters instead. From the data we cannot conclusively say why there is a difference between group and one-on-one contexts, but we speculate that in a group context people prefer to blend in and may not be so vocal, but in a one-on-one context they are free to be themselves and may be more forthright. Other factors may include the age of the children, expected involvement of parents in activities and whether the lessons are examination driven or not.

In conclusion, this article contributes to the debates on developing effective partnerships between parents and teachers as the results of this research seem to indicate the need for a better alignment of values, attitudes and interactions between parents and teachers. Therefore, we argue that it is necessary for both parties to see each other as equal partners, where parents view teachers as experts in music education, and teachers view parents as experts in understanding and managing their children. This would create a context where mutual trust, respect and appreciation of each other would be possible. In addition, it is vital for parents and teachers to collaborate, since they share the responsibility of educating, understanding and playing their various roles; they need to jointly plan and evaluate their strategies to support the well-being and learning outcomes for children. Therefore, we argue for a more complex view of these parent–teacher relationships, where the parties become partners who share the values of 'mutuality, reciprocity, trust, shared decision making and collaborative relationships' (Rouse & O'Brien 2017, p. 50). We believe that this will significantly reduce instances of conflict and promote effective parent–teacher partnerships in music lessons.

Notes

1 Personal communication with Ryan Lewis, the South and East Asia regional consultant for ABRSM via a WhatsApp message on 5th September 2018.
2 Personal communication with U-Jin Lim, the regional academic consultant for TCL via a phone call on 7th September 2018.
3 There were four parents in one of the classes because the husband and wife couple took turns in answering the questions during the interview as they were caring for their baby.

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