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SUMMARY

Constructivist learning theories have emphasized the importance of responding to the learner’s perspectives in educational settings. With teachers taking the role of learners within professional development (PD) initiatives, it is imperative to give ‘voice’ to them so that PD can better respond to their own beliefs and preferences. Currently, little is known about primary school music teachers’ own perspectives of PD. Drawing on the notion of ‘responsive PD’, this thesis targets this literature gap and focuses on music teachers’ perspectives regarding: 1) their understandings of the notion of PD; 2) the structural and design features of their perceived most and least helpful PD; and 3) the use of live and video-mediated peer observation in PD. Three empirical studies were conducted to investigate these topics.

In the first study, 315 teachers were asked to define PD using their own words. Descriptive statistics, cluster analysis, and cross-tabulations were used to analyze the definitions and the extent to which these differed according to variables like age, general teaching experience, specialization, and designation. Results showed that teachers’ definitions were not entirely consistent with those proposed in the educational literature. No major differences were identified when teachers’ definitions were compared according to the variables mentioned.

In the second study, Desimone’s (2009) theoretical framework of critical features for high-quality PD was used to investigate the features of the most and least helpful PD, as perceived by music specialists. Data were drawn from two focus group discussions (n = 7, n = 5) and a nationwide survey (n = 113) and analyzed using content analysis and descriptive/parametric statistics, respectively. Results showed that the participants preferred long and work-intensive PD experiences focused on a mix of content directly applicable in class. They also valued having active learning
opportunities and interacting with familiar fellow colleagues. The findings showed that Singapore music specialists highly valued the features described in Desimone’s (2009) framework.

In the third study, interviews were used to explore 12 teachers’ perceptions on: 1) The ways in which peer observation helps music teachers in their professional practice; and 2) Why video-mediated peer observation should be used as a tool to foster music teachers’ professional learning. The findings showed that Singapore music teachers: 1) Valued peer observation because it inspired lesson design, allowed for a better understanding and application of teaching strategies, allowed for the anticipation of students’ reactions, and contributed in building their confidence; and 2) Were optimistic towards video-mediated peer observation because it is convenient, easily accessible, and may provide contextualized examples of good classroom practices.

On the basis of the findings, this thesis suggests that it would be beneficial for PD providers and facilitators to 1) work with music teachers to ensure that all parties involved in PD initiatives have similar understanding of the outcomes and scope of PD; 2) implement PD initiatives that are aligned with Desimone’s (2009) theoretical framework; and 3) develop contextualized video repositories to foster music teachers’ professional growth. General conclusions, further research lines, and limitations are discussed in the final chapter.