Integration in Hong Kong Early Childhood Education:
Perceptions, Practice, and Policy

by

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative study focused on young children with disabilities who can benefit from an integration program and the people around them such as their learning peers and parents. In Hong Kong, little research exists on integrated programs for young children with disabilities at the pre-primary education level. This case study adopts an interpretivist approach and focuses on the roles and perceptions of teachers in the integration programs of Kindergarten-Cum-Child-Care Centres (KCCCCs). A comprehensive literature review examined research addressing current problems in KCCCC integration programs. Using a series of questions in Stage 1, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with 28 teaching staff (principals, special education teachers, and mainstream teachers) from four privately run KCCCCs with integrated programs. Stage 2 consisted of two case studies of KCCCCs chosen for the individual and informal interviews. In-depth analyses of the data collected from the interviews revealed some significant problems because of the ‘gulf’ between government policy and school practices in the integration program. These problems are identified in this study as arising from two main sources: insufficient human support (e.g., teacher training, professional help, support for the families of young disabled children, and public education), and insufficient physical support (e.g., admissions policies, funding and resources, instructions for the implementation of the program, transition planning, and external support for the integrated programs). One key recommendation was that the Hong Kong government should provide adequate human and physical support to mainstream KCCCCs with integrated programs to meet the needs of young children with disabilities as well as their families. Another recommendation was that the government should take further steps to educate all stakeholders about integrated programs.
# Table of Contents

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- Definition of Terms ................................................................. 13
- The Research Problem ................................................................. 20
- Research Aims ........................................................................... 25
- Research Questions ...................................................................... 25
- Conceptual Framework ................................................................. 26
  - Models of Inclusive Education .................................................. 26
    - The psycho-medical model ...................................................... 26
    - The sociological model .......................................................... 27
    - The organizational model ...................................................... 28
- The Study Design ........................................................................ 29
- Overview of the Study Design ....................................................... 29
- Background of the Researcher ...................................................... 30
- Summary .................................................................................... 32

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

- History of Special Education in Hong Kong .................................... 33
- Definition of Mainstreaming .......................................................... 34
- Definition of Inclusion/Inclusive and Integration Education .............. 36
- Models of Inclusive Education ........................................................ 37
- Hong Kong Policy and Development of Integrated Programs .......... 40
- The Current Practices of the Integrated Program ............................... 45
  - The Integrated Program for Young Children with Disabilities ........ 45
  - The Individualized Educational Plan and Quality Assurance Mechanisms .... 45
  - Constructs Influencing Teaching Staff Perceptions and Attitudes ....... 46
Teaching Staff .......................................................... 74
Principals ................................................................. 74
Special Education Teachers ............................................ 74
Mainstream Teachers ..................................................... 75
Document Study .......................................................... 76
Documentation .............................................................. 76
Data Analysis ............................................................... 77
Stage 1: Interview & Transcription of the Data ......................... 78
The first part: Topic coding .............................................. 78
The second part: Topic coding .......................................... 79
The third part—Analytical coding ....................................... 79
Stage 2: Case Study ....................................................... 80
Trustworthiness ............................................................ 81
Ethical Concerns ........................................................ 82
Limitations ..................................................................... 82
Conclusion ..................................................................... 84

CHAPTER 4: DATA AND ANALYSIS ............................................. 86
Integration Program ......................................................... 86
Different Viewpoints on the Integrated Program ....................... 88
Positive Perceptions and Attitudes ....................................... 89
Negative Perceptions and Attitudes ..................................... 92
Problems in daily practice ................................................. 92
Unfairness to young children without disabilities .................... 92
A burden to KCCCC and teaching staff ................................ 93
The Human and Physical Support and Its Effect on the Functional Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers in Integration KCCCs ........................................... 94
Human Support: Teacher Training in Early Childhood Special Education .......... 94
Professional Help: Allied Health Services Provided by the Government .............. 98
Physical Support ......................................................................................... 101
Admission policy ....................................................................................... 101
Funding policy .......................................................................................... 102
Implementation Guidelines ........................................................................... 106
Promotion of Harmony among People in Society ........................................ 107
Promoting Public Education ....................................................................... 108
Conclusion ................................................................................................. 110

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY KCCCC (1) .............................................................. 112
The KCCCC (1) Facility and Environment .................................................... 112
The Facility .................................................................................................. 112
Environment .............................................................................................. 113
The Staff at KCCCC (1) ................................................................................. 114
The Principal at KCCCC (1) ......................................................................... 114
The Special Education Teacher at KCCCC (1) ............................................... 115
The Mainstream Teachers at KCCCC (1) ...................................................... 116
The Young Children at KCCCC (1) ............................................................... 119
Current Practices in the Integrated Program at KCCCC (1) ....................... 119
Integration Practices Provided by the Government ....................................... 119
Admission for a Young Child with a Disability .............................................. 119
External Support for the Integrated Program .............................................. 120
Professional Help: Allied Health Services Provided by the Government ...... 122
CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY KCCCC (2)........................................................................126

The KCCCC (2) Facility and Environment ......................................................... 126

Facility ............................................................................................................. 126

Environment ................................................................................................. 127

The Staff at KCCCC (2).................................................................................... 129

The Principal at KCCCC (2) ........................................................................... 130

The Special Education Teacher at KCCCC (2) .............................................. 131

The Mainstream Teacher at KCCCC (2) ......................................................... 132

The Young Children at KCCCC (2) ................................................................. 133

Integration Practices Provided by the Government ........................................ 134

Admission for a Young Child with Disability ............................................... 134

Professional Support Provided by Government ............................................. 135

Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 137

Comparison of Case Studies ......................................................................... 138

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..............................139

Aims of the Study ............................................................................................ 139

The Study Design ........................................................................................... 142

Stage 1: Interview ......................................................................................... 142

Stage 2: Case Studies .................................................................................... 142

Summary of the Key Findings of the Study .................................................... 143

Professional Help .......................................................................................... 144

The Gap between Government Policy and School Practice ....................... 144

Insufficient Teacher Training ....................................................................... 145
Lack of Public Education ................................................................. 145
Insufficient Physical Support ......................................................... 145
Inadequate Instructions and Guidelines for Daily Implementation .............. 146
Insufficient Funding and Resources .................................................. 146
Inadequate Transition to Primary Schools ......................................... 146
Recommendations for Government Policy and School Practice .................. 147
Increasing Development Funding ..................................................... 147
Assign More Funding to Employ Professionals ..................................... 148
Increased Teacher Training in ECSE ............................................... 148
Improving Instructions for Implementing the Program .......................... 149
Increasing Places in the Integrated Program ....................................... 150
Increasing External Support for the Integrated Program ........................ 150
Facilitating a Smooth Transition ..................................................... 151
Improving Structural Quality .......................................................... 152
Appropriate and Flexible Instruction ............................................... 152
Promoting the Quality of Professional Work ..................................... 154
Further Study ............................................................................... 155

REFERENCES ................................................................................. 156

APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule [English] ........................................ 193
Appendix A1: Interview Schedule [Chinese] ........................................ 195
Appendix B: Consent Form [English] [Principal] ................................... 198
Appendix B1: Consent Form [English] [Teachers] ................................. 200
Appendix B2: Consent Form [Chinese] ............................................... 202
Appendix C: A list of KCCCC Documents Related to the Integrated Program ... 205
Appendix D: Interview Coding Protocol ............................................. 207
List of Figures

Figure 1: The methodology of the study................................................................. 66
List of Tables

Table 1: Three Models of Research into Special Educational Needs........................................29
Table 2: Number of Participants for Interviews in each KCCCC ...........................................65
Table 3: Timetable of Interviews .............................................................................................73
Table 4: Selection Criteria for Interviewees in each Integrated KCCCC .................................75
Table 5: Table of Coding—Interview—Part One .....................................................................78
Table 6: Table of Coding—Interview—Part Two .....................................................................80
Table 7: Coding for Documentation .........................................................................................81
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 provides the background for this study and includes definitions of terms, identifies the research problem, and addresses the aims, research questions, methodology, and significance of this study. The chapter concludes with an outline of subsequent chapters.

Definition of Terms

Attitudes

*Attitudes* are defined as ‘learned and stable predispositions to react to a given situation, person, or other set of cues in a consistent way’ (Corsini, 1999). Therefore, attitudes guide and influence people’s behaviours in their daily lives. Researchers have argued that teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion are a very important variable in the implementation of successful inclusive practices (Parasuram, 2006; Rakap & Kaczmarek, 2010).

Perceptions and Attitudes in Inclusive Education

*Perceptions* are learned concepts which may be influenced by genetic and physiological factors such as personal experiences (Oskamp, 1991). Teachers’ perceptions may be influenced by: background, training, current teaching situation, and characteristics of students with disabilities (Hsieh, Hsieh, Ostrosky, & McCollum, 2012). Hence perceptions and attitudes are interrelated.

Classroom Practices

It will be demonstrated that daily *classroom practices* in integrated settings are influenced by the availability of human support (e.g. teacher training and professional help) and physical support (e.g., funding and resources, environment, curriculum and instructional strategies, and home-school partnerships).
Inclusive Policy

An important aspect of policy development is the designation of clear roles and responsibilities between the various governmental departments responsible for implementing an inclusive policy. Based on internationally developing trends (UNESCO, 2007; Warnock, 1978), many countries now include students with disabilities in mainstream education, (Srivastava, de Boer, & Pijl, 2015).

Disability and Handicapped

The term disability has negative connotations and could prove harmful to people to whom this label is assigned. However, it will be used in this study because the term is the chosen language of the Hong Kong government in official records, documents, and websites, for example, Services for Preschool Disabled Children (Social Welfare Department, 2008d) and An Operational Guide to Childcare Centres Operating an Integrated Program for Disabled Children (Social Welfare Department, 2001). Hence, this study will use the terms disability and disabled to describe the population.

Internationally, the concept of disability is situation-bound and can be particular to individual cases (Ingstad & Whyte, 1995; Pardeck, 2005; Venkatesan, 2004). For example, “people might be disabled by physical, intellectual or sensory impairment, by medical conditions, or mental illness” (Herbert, 2005, p. 2; see also T. E. Smith, Polloway, Patton, Dowdy, & Doughty, 2015).

In 1980, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified and clarified the distinction between impairment, disability and handicapped in its second White Paper on Rehabilitation: Equal Opportunities and Full Participation: A Better Tomorrow for All (Hong Kong Government, 1995). Thus, disability refers to impaired bodily functions, while handicapped indicates a function of the relationship between disabled people and
the environment in which they live. People who are handicapped have physical, cultural, or social barriers, and little access to many facilities available to other people.

In 2007, a new classification of disability, namely ‘International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health’ (ICF), was endorsed after the 54th World Health Assembly held in 2001 (Rehabilitation Advisory committee, 2005). The Hong Kong government followed the ICF to re-classify the categories of disability previously listed in the 1999 Hong Kong Rehabilitation Program Plan and finalized the following categories of impairment as disability:

- attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder;
- autism;
- hearing impairment;
- mental handicap;
- mental illness;
- physical handicap;
- specific learning difficulties;
- speech impairment;
- visceral disability; and
- visual impairment. (Health and Welfare Bureau, 2007, p. 6)

As of mid-2017, the policy in mainstream Kindergarten-Cum-Child-Care-Centres (KCCCCs) integrated young children from two to six years old with mild mental handicaps and mild-to-moderate physical handicaps, such as the following:

- mildly mentally handicapped;
- slightly physically handicapped and without serious mobility problems;
- mildly or moderately auditory impaired;
- mildly or moderately visually impaired; or
autistic (Social Welfare Department, 2008d)

For the purposes of this study, the term disability references young children who are between the ages of 2 and 6 with different special needs. A professional support team, composed of medical officers or psychologists in a Child Assessment Centre controlled by the Hong Kong government, usually identifies these children based on developmental delays, speech impairment, autistic spectrum disorder, visual impairment, hearing impairment, or mild or moderate grade mental or physical handicaps. Hence, if the identified children attend pre-primary education, they most likely receive education in integrated KCCCC serving young children with disabilities (Social Welfare Department, 2008b).

Integration, Mainstreaming, and Inclusion

The meaning of integration essentially ‘entails a process of making whole, of combining different elements into a unity’ (Hegarty, Pocklington, & Lucas, 1981, p. 11). The term integration has wider application in Western countries (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Warnock & Norwich, 2010). For example in the United States, the term mainstreaming is synonymous with integration. Mainstreaming means enrolling exceptional children in regular classes for the majority of the school day, under the charge of a regular classroom teacher. The teacher ensures those children receive special education of a high quality to the extent needed, and works to integrate the children through normalisation into a mainstream setting (Brich, 1978; Wendelborg & Tøssebro, 2011).

Policies of integration established by the United Kingdom, including the 1978 Warnock Report Policies (Warnock, 1978) and the 1981 Education Act (Great Britain Department of Education and Science, 1981), significantly influenced the integration policy developed by the Hong Kong government in the late 1970s. The Hong Kong
government used the term integration to refer to the implementation of special educational programs in mainstream settings. Hong Kong implemented this policy because it was easier to integrate mainstream schools at the pre-to-secondary level, which offered integrated programs and which normally included students with mild mental handicaps, mild or moderate physical handicaps, or sensory impairments (Education Department, 1997; Social Welfare Department, 2001). Usually students with developmental delays, speech impairments, autistic spectrum disorder, hearing and visual impairments, and mild or moderate mental or physical handicaps have sufficient abilities to learn if teachers modify the curriculum to suit their needs (Crawford, 1991; Crawford, Heung, Yip, Yuen, & Yim, 1999). Young disabled children studying in mainstream KCCCSs with integrated programs also receive additional support, such as individualized educational programs and professional help (e.g., psychological and paramedical services). However, the integrated program does not require restructured content and delivery of the curriculum (Yuen & Westwood, 2001).

In the late 1980s, the term inclusion began to replace integration in the field of special education (G. Thomas, 1997). Inclusion had already gained currency in North America and particularly in the United States. The term inclusion created a more specific way of describing what British educationalists called functional integration; that is, integration indicated the child with special needs would have curricular involvement, rather than merely social involvement, with his or her mainstream peers. The term inclusion, however, embraced a much deeper philosophical notion of what integration should mean and, in this sense, was truly prescriptive. Inclusion meant that the school and education system accepted all children regardless of their abilities, gender, race, and social backgrounds (Crawford et al., 1999; Elkins, 1998; G. Thomas, 1997). In addition, inclusion referred to ‘the complete acceptance of a student with a disability in a regular
class, with appropriate changes being made to ensure that the student is included in all activities of the class’ (Ashman & Elkins, 2002, p. 77). According to UNESCO (2007), inclusive education offered a developmental approach that advocated the learning needs of all people, including children, youth, and adults, especially for those vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion.

Consequently, integration and inclusion were different concepts. Indeed, Lloyd (2000) pointed out that the terms could not be interchangeable or used synonymously. Nevertheless, some scholars (Knight, 1999; Segal, 1993; Sikes, Lawson, & Parker, 2007; Slee, 2001) have also argued that, because of the absence of any universal definition of what the terms integration and inclusion mean, the result has been that different factions of interest groups have exploited the terms in various ways with the consequence that integration and inclusion can be seen as synonymous. Besides, the basic concepts of integration and inclusion, and even the notions of mainstreaming and normalization, are also linked to the rights of the children in relation to equal opportunities, social justice, and equity. The terms integration, inclusion, mainstream, and normalization will therefore be used synonymously and interchangeably throughout this study. However, since integration is still the term used in policy documents and in practice in Hong Kong mainstream preschools, the study will focus on integration.

Kindergarten-Cum-Child-Care Centres

At present in Hong Kong, only a Kindergarten-Cum-Child-Care Centre offers an integrated program for young disabled children (Social Welfare Department, HKSAR, 2008b). As the term suggests, a KCCCC provides both kindergarten and childcare services for young children under the age of 6. Both the Hong Kong Education Ordinance and the Childcare Services Ordinance and Regulations govern these centres. In order to provide one-stop services, the Joint Office, which is part of the Education Bureau, monitors the
KCCCCs (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003; Social Welfare Department, 2008c) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) monitors the integration service for young disabled children.

This study was limited to the pre-primary educational setting. All kindergartens and KCCCCs in Hong Kong are private facilities and categorized as non-profit, which means kindergartens and private independent kindergartens, depending on their sponsoring organizations, can be either voluntary agencies or private enterprises. At present, in Hong Kong, the integrated program for young disabled children is only offered in KCCCCs (Social Welfare Department, 2008b).

**Teaching Staff**

This study uses the term *teaching staff* to refer to a group of people involved in mainstream KCCCCs which operate the integrated program. Teaching staff comprise the following:

- **Principal** refers to a person in charge of a mainstream KCCCC that operates the integrated program.

- **Special education teacher** refers to a person who serves in a mainstream KCCCC and is mainly responsible for teaching and caring for young children with disabilities.

- **Mainstream teacher** refers to a person who serves in a mainstream KCCCC operating in the integrated program; these individuals are responsible for teaching and caring for young children, regardless of their abilities, in a mainstream classroom.

In this study, the interviewees were all female. In Hong Kong, as in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, there are many more females than males in the teaching profession, especially in preschools (Blatz, 2007; Eng, 2004; J. Smith, 2005).
According to the *Statistics Report on Women and Men in Hong Kong*, undertaken by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department in 2007, females comprised 99.2% of all teachers in the pre-primary education setting (Census and Statistics Department, 2007).

**The Research Problem**

The concept of integrating young children with disabilities originated in the United Kingdom, with Hong Kong implementing a related policy in pre-to-secondary school beginning in the late 1970s. Subsequently, mainstream primary and secondary schools provided various integration services, such as special classes (e.g., for students with sensory impairments) for school-aged students with disabilities (Lai, 2006). The implementation of the integrated program for young children with disabilities in mainstream childcare centres began in 1978, organised by the SWD. In 1988, the program commenced in mainstream kindergartens, managed by the Education Department (the Education Bureau since July 1, 2007) (Hong Kong Government, 1995).

With the ongoing movement towards integration, the 1977 *White Paper on Rehabilitation* proposed that the number of special schools for students with disabilities needed to increase within ten years (Hong Kong Government, 1977). Furthermore, in 1990, the Hong Kong government also recommended that more special schools for disabled students at should begin operating at the secondary school level (Education Commission, 1990). At the pre-primary level, the special childcare centres for young children with moderate-to-severe disabilities increased fourfold from the late 1970s to the early 2000s (Census and Statistics Department, 1987, 1989, 1995, 1996, 2002).

Such developments demonstrate the government’s promotion of segregated settings rather than integrated ones in Hong Kong’s pre-to-secondary schools. However, some scholars expressed concern that the increased number of integrated pre-to-secondary schools would lack full implementation (Crawford, 1991). Crawford (1990),
for example, noted some success in integrating young disabled children into mainstream kindergartens because of the flexibility of these settings, but he did not consider the integrated program in mainstream childcare centres a success.

Influenced by the inclusion movement in the 1990s, the Hong Kong government implemented a pilot project named ‘Whole School Approach’ in 1997 to include students in mainstream primary and secondary schools. This policy reflected and demonstrated governmental neglect in developing integration for young disabled children at the pre-primary level. As a consequence, parents of young disabled children noted insufficient support for their children’s study in integrated settings. Because early childhood education was not compulsory in Hong Kong, the attitude of the government towards the development of integrated programs for young disabled children was not too surprising (Lai & Wong, 2007; Rao & Koong, 2000). Because of this the government does not have the obligation for promoting the integrated program for young disabled children in mainstream KCCCCs.

There is a need for an in-depth understanding of the background of integrated education in Hong Kong’s KCCCCs which would address the perceptions and practices of the teaching staff at integrated KCCCCs and the impact of the education policies. Pre-primary education in Hong Kong, according to the government, refers to programs for children from 2 to 6 years of age who receive, through a group of qualified staff and a relaxing and pleasurable learning environment, care and education designed to promote balanced development in cognition, physical fitness, emotional and social well-being, and aesthetic appreciation (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003).

Teachers’ perceptions and attitudes are learned concepts, and they may be influenced by personal and group experiences and the media (Oskamp, 1991). Perceptions and attitudes are interrelated. Accordingly, in the KCCCC integration
program, the attitudes of teaching staff towards integration and disabilities can influence their perceptions about integrated programs and disabilities in general (De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005).

Influenced by the inclusion movement in the 1990s, the Hong Kong government implemented a pilot project that included students in mainstream primary and secondary schools. However, scholars (Crawford et al., 1999; V. Pearson et al., 1998) argued that the pilot project had limited value because the primary and secondary schools only integrated school-aged students with mild or moderate-grade disabilities. Ultimately, the results from the pilot project were ineffective due to the shortage of teacher training, related equipment, inflexible curriculum, and teachers’ negative attitudes towards integration (Crawford et al., 1999; Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2012; V. Pearson et al., 1998; Poon-McBrayer, 2004). In addition, the teachers’ negative attitudes about students with disabilities was a major concern. Based on their beliefs and previous experiences, they recognized that disabled school-age students had some limitations that could affect their participation in daily academic learning and that might consequently affect the academic results of the schools (Students with disabilities, 2002). However, despite obvious drawbacks, Whole School Approach project of integrated education, continued.

A survey undertaken in the early stages of the project found that teachers and principals were sceptical about its results. In 2004, the Hong Kong Primary Education Research Association and the Special Education Society of Hong Kong surveyed 2,532 principals and teachers and 1,500 parents from 232 mainstream primary schools with and without the integrated program (Parents urge the children, 2006; The students with special needs in mainstream primary schools had been bullied by their classmates, 2006;
The Education and Manpower Bureau, 2006). The survey asked about the views of each stakeholder on integrating students with diverse needs into mainstream primary settings.

The findings indicated that the majority of principals, teachers, and parents considered the project a failure that offered little support for school-aged children. The primary school teachers expressed concern and frustration about the lack of support for students during daily lessons. Ultimately, they noted that special schools, rather than the mainstream schools, would better serve the disabled students. Furthermore, parents with disabled school-aged children enrolled in integrated primary schools also preferred that their children attend the special schools to obtain suitable learning through daily practice. They said that, in the integrated schools, their children were constantly bullied by non-disabled classmates, which led to psychological problems and a fear of going to school. In response, the chair of the Hong Kong Professional Union requested that teachers in integrated settings provide suitable care and learning to students with disabilities (M. K. Cheung, 2005).

In addition, Cheuk (2007) found that teachers in mainstream KCCCCCs with integrated programs said they believed that young disabled children had difficulty maintaining acceptable academic levels. Consequently, teachers at KCCCCCs using the integrated program mainly focused on enhancing social development for young children with disabilities. Cheuk’s (2007) study motivated me to know more about daily practices and policy regarding children with disabilities who were included in mainstream classrooms.

Despite the criticism of mainstream primary and secondary schools and the failures during implementation of the integrated program, the Hong Kong government has worked very hard to develop different programs for integrating school-aged children with disabilities during the past three decades. For instance, during the 2007-2008
school year, the government instituted a five-year in-service teacher professional development training course for teaching staff in primary, secondary, and special schools to enhance the teachers’ competence in supporting disabled students in mainstream schools (Education Bureau, 2008c).

Nevertheless, although there were numerous reports in the literature indicating that preschool integration could be beneficial to young disabled children and the people around them (Bennett, Lee, & Lueke, 1998; Buysse & Bailey, 1993; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Guralnick, 1990, 1994, 2001; Hornby, 1992; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; Strain, 1990; Unianu, 2012; Wood, 1993), the government withdrew the integrated program in mainstream kindergartens effective in the 2005-2006 school year (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003).

To investigate the quality of integration practice, it is important to understand the perceptions of teaching staff at KCCCCs because their role ‘is diverse and encompasses the education of children both in the home and in the community’ (Sebastian-Nickell & Milne, 1992). Specifically, the perceptions of teaching staff regarding integration in KCCCCs might influence whether and how they implement integration approaches involving young disabled children. Understanding the perceptions of teaching staff in this context is essential to providing a framework for interpreting the actions and reactions of persons vital to successfully integrating KCCCCs (Stoiber & Houghton, 1993). Through examining attitudes and perceptions, an understanding of the development of KCCCC integration options and standards of practice can emerge, which can prove instructional to program design. Hence, researchers should carefully examine and analyze the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of teaching staff in mainstream KCCCCs offering an integrated program.
Research Aims

The aim of this research project was to investigate Hong Kong KCCCCs, the background of integration education in early childhood settings, the perceptions and attitudes of teachers in these settings, the roles and responsibilities of teachers in such settings, and practices that could potentially improve government policies, procedures, and programs. The study endeavoured to:

- examine the perceptions of teachers connected to the integrated program for young children with disabilities in mainstream KCCCCs in Hong Kong;
- identify the current practices of the integrated program in the selected sites;
- evaluate the benefits and weaknesses of the integrated program for young children with disabilities, and their non-disabled peers, from the perspective of teaching staff in mainstream KCCCCs in Hong Kong.

The interpretive study examined four private-sector (those receiving government subsidies) pre-primary institutions offering integration programs for children aged 2 to 6 years from families with middle-to-lower socioeconomic status, which is the socioeconomic status (SES) of the majority of the people in Hong Kong. For this study, the researcher recruited four KCCCCs with similar SES (middle-to-lower). Finally, two case studies of KCCCCs meeting these requirements were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of teachers’ perceptions and current practices under the education policy in integration education.

Research Questions

The investigation was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practices?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings?

3. How do the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration education in such settings?

4. Based on the research literature and study findings, what are the recommendations for possible improvement of KCCCC integration?

**Conceptual Framework**

This section develops a framework for exploring and understanding teachers’ perceptions and attitudes, and the practices and policies of integration in Hong Kong early childhood education. The framework is derived from the literature which is reviewed in Chapter 2, and it relates to the perceptions and attitudes of teachers, the daily practices of KCCCCs in Hong Kong, and the government’s policy.

**Models of Inclusive Education**

The conceptual framework that guides this study is derived from the review of literature and three models defined by Skidmore (1996) for inclusive education. Several authors have discussed one or two of the models; however, few researchers have addressed all three models together (D. J. Gallagher, Connor, & Ferri, 2014; Giota & Emanuelsson, 2011).

**The psycho-medical model.** This model was conceptualized as arising from the medical condition of the individual child. Borrowed from the medical discipline, it tends to be quasi-clinical in character. The model focuses on refining screening instruments designed to diagnose the presence of a supposed syndrome. The forms of treatment advocated may include the administration of drugs or therapeutic interventions.

During the 1990s, many parents in Sweden demanded that their children be examined by experts, such as physicians and psychologists, because such an expert-given
diagnosis was thought to increase the chances of the student receiving the support needed from the school (Giota & Emanuelsson, 2011). However, the continual emphasis on addressing individual deficits in children and young people categorized as disabled and/or having special educational needs has been shown to be likely to result in perpetuation of the psycho-medical model of provision (Shevlin, Winter, & Flynn 2013).

The psycho-medical model has garnered professional support from clinical psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and language therapists and has benefited young disabled children. The therapists and psychologists have provided quality training for the young disabled children in integrated KCCCs. This is important because, as the literature points out, adequate and appropriate manpower (Poon-McBrayer, 2004) and professional assistance (Odom & McEvoy, 1990) are important to the implementation of effective programs in integrated settings.

**The sociological model.** This approach treats the sorting function of special education as an automatic and mechanistic process, as if children arrived at a particular level and then were carefully assigned to their appropriate track, in a smooth, uninterrupted stream. Shakespeare and Watson (2001) asserted that the sociological model implies that disabled people are being oppressed, but they did not accept that this is all there is to disability: they outlined a role for impairment in shaping the restriction of activity in disabled people’s lives. Also, the sociological model is rooted firmly in the human rights paradigm, which advocates inclusion and the removal of all barriers that hinder the full participation of individuals with disabilities (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). The sociological model took on a life of its own and it became a primary guide for newly emerging disability equality training. It also soon became the vehicle for developing and strengthening the lives of people with disabilities (Oliver, 2013). For example, the integrated setting is seen as a suitable environment from within which
young disabled children can interact with their peers. It claims that a model that assists disabled children through daily activities that include supports (such as special education teachers who set an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and who communicate with mainstream teachers to collaborate effectively) will provide the best education for all children (abled and disabled) in the same classrooms. The integrated program provides a unique experience allowing mainstream children to interact with young disabled children and their peers. Children in class are thus seen to become more conscious of helping other people who need assistance (Koegel, Kuriakose, Singh, & Koegel, 2012).

The organizational model. This model has made a significant contribution to the understanding of how students come to have special educational needs by drawing attention to the role of school and classroom-level factors that lie within the power of educators to affect, and that are implicated in students’ learning. Furthermore, it has been associated with school restructuring programs that appear to be successful in promoting the social integration of students with special needs, and that do not have an adverse impact on learning outcomes and may be associated with improved skills attainment. This model has been criticized because of its tendency to view the school as immovable, resulting in a simplistic view of the process of organizational development.

It is said that teaching staff at KCCCs adopting integration settings, (e.g. principals, special education teachers and mainstream teachers) tend to believe that they can enable young children with disabilities to participate in daily practices. It is said that by using tailor-made syllabuses to meet disabled children’s needs, teachers can help them imitate their mainstream peers when learning and playing, especially in language and social skills (Camargo et al., 2014).
Table 1

*The Three Models of Research into Special Educational Needs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Model of causation</th>
<th>Form of intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-medical</td>
<td>Individual differences and needs within the child</td>
<td>Clinical remediation, clinical psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and language therapists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociological</td>
<td>Integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools through processes of sorting and tracking</td>
<td>Adequate policy for integrated program admission, professional help, and smooth transition to primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Insufficient resources such as human support, physical support, and instructional guidelines at KCCCCs with integrated programs</td>
<td>Restructuring school curriculum to reduce organizational deficiencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Study Design**

**Overview of the Study Design**

This study was designed to investigate current practices of the integrated program at Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs from the viewpoints of teaching staff (e.g., principals, special education teachers, and mainstream teachers). The study adopted an interpretive qualitative approach and utilized data collected in two stages. Stage 1 took the form of semi-structured interviews. Stage 2 developed case studies that included documentation and informal interviews to triangulate data acquired during Stage 1 and
to include the lived experiences unfolding in the daily practices at KCCCs with integration programs.

Documentation provides information regarding strategies and procedures for analyzing and interpreting documents in a particular area of a study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Wellington, 2000). In this study, documentary analysis provided information about the past and present policies and practices of integration at the levels of the government and schools; it thus traced the progression of young children with disabilities in mainstream KCCCs.

Gathering documents can be efficient, cost-effective, and productive because the data already exist and can provide additional support for empirical data collected. Documents also supplement interviews. Thus, they can enhance the trustworthiness of research in terms of triangulating data collected from semi-structured interviews, case studies, and informal interviews (Merriam, 1998a; Wellington, 2000).

This study was limited to the pre-primary educational setting. All kindergartens and KCCCs in Hong Kong are privately run and categorized as non-profit and independent; their sponsoring organizations can be either voluntary agencies or private enterprises.

**Background of the Researcher**

The impetus for the study originated in the early 2000s. A major influence was receiving my first diploma in Hong Kong, with a focus on early childhood education. The courses provided me with many opportunities to share and discuss issues with classmates concerning the integration program at Hong Kong KCCCs. Throughout those discussions, I recognized that integrated programs were invaluable, not only for students with disabilities, but also for their parents, their peers without disabilities, and their peers' parents (Chazan, Liang, & Davies, 1991; Clough & Lindsay, 1991; Gross, 2002; Turk,
My first degree in Australia focused on early childhood education, and through this experience I had the chance to learn that classroom integration was about disabled people’s rights and equal opportunities to have access to the diverse aspects of our society (T. Cole, 1989; Gow, Ward, & Chow, 1989; Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow, & Coleman, 2006; Norwich, 1994 Safford, 1989; UNESCO, 1994; Wolfendale, 2000).

While pursuing my master’s degree in early childhood education (ECE) in Australia in the early 2000s, I gained a deeper understanding of young children with and without disabilities. At the time this study was conducted, I worked as an early childhood educator at a teacher training institution in Hong Kong. This experience provided me the opportunity to visit many mainstream preschools with integrated programs. Thus, through observation of young disabled children and talking with preschool teaching staff of young children with and without disabilities, my knowledge of preschool integration, especially in the Hong Kong context, was significantly enriched.

In addition, few empirical research studies on preschool integration in Hong Kong existed when I began this study. Furthermore, I suspected that, because the kindergartens stopped operating integrated programs in the 2005-2006 school year, the significance of Cheuk’s (2007) study might be reduced. In this context, it seemed necessary to conduct more research aimed at understanding the perceptions and attitudes of persons such as teachers and parents of children with disabilities regarding this population. Scholars have asserted that such research could powerfully impact the learning contexts of those children (Erwin, Puig, Evenson, & Beresford, 2012; Erwin, Soodak, Winton, & Turnbull 2001; Henry, 2000; Kortman, 2001). This meant that the perceptions, teaching strategies, and design of the curriculum could reflect the progress of the current practices of the integrated program, and identify the benefits and
weaknesses of integration for young children with disabilities and for the people serving them in local mainstream KCCCs.

This study, which incorporates the perspectives of teaching staff and which investigates current practices, will provide rich information about integration practices in mainstream KCCCs. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the issues and a critical analysis of the local literature related to the field could assist both young children with and without disabilities and their parents and teachers in establishing a program that works for all.

**Summary**

This thesis contains seven chapters. Chapter 1 identified and defined key terminology used in the study and described the research problem, aims, questions, and research design. Chapter 2 outlines studies focusing on the integration of young disabled children. It also presents the principles of integration for young children with disabilities and discusses the issues that influence the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff and parents towards integrated programs in mainstream KCCCs. Chapter 3 outlines and justifies the qualitative research approach applied in the study and describes the particulars of the methods and procedures employed for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the concerns of teaching staff regarding the integration of young disabled children into mainstream KCCCC classrooms. Chapter 5 and 6 describe and analyse educational provision at the two integrated KCCCCs chosen for the case studies (KCCCC 1 and KCCCC 2). Chapter 7 presents conclusions and draws recommendations from the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter outlines the history and principles of integration for young children with disabilities. In addition, to set the scene for this study, it discusses three research models guiding integrated programs at mainstream KCCCCs. Because only a few research studies have addressed pre-primary integration in Hong Kong, this chapter also explores the ways in which teaching staff in Hong Kong view integration programs for young children with disabilities in KCCCCs.

History of Special Education in Hong Kong

Before discussing integration education in Hong Kong, the history of special education there will be briefly outlined. Special education students in Hong Kong, as the name indicates, are defined as a specific group of children who have been identified as having one or more types of problems that do not permit them to readily study in the normal classroom and who need to be provided with a special type of education (Yung, 1998, p. 39).

Internationally, over time, the concept of special educational need has undergone significant revisions. For example, the psycho-medical paradigm or the individual gaze (Fulcher, 1989), which understands special needs as intelligible entirely in terms of the characteristics of the disabled individual, has been replaced by the interactive or organizational paradigm (Clark, Dyson, Millward, & Skidmore, 1997). The latter, while acknowledging differences between individual children, does not view these differences alone as adequately accounting for the educational failure of children. Central to this change are ways of viewing and thus working with special educational needs (SEN) children. It has been recognised that placement circumstances often determine whether individual characteristics are considered a cause of difficulty (Norwich, 1994).
The needs of the child become *special* when there is a mismatch between the learner’s characteristics and the other interacting forces at play in the classroom (Montgomery, 1990). Therefore, with an eco-systemic framework (Cooper & Upton, 1991), the concept of SEN becomes an emergent property of interactions between children and classroom/school systems. These considerations have moved away from a deficit view of special educational needs, wherein there is something considered missing from the individual, towards a social/psychological/biological model of SEN (Cooper, 1999; Norwich, 1994) that considers individual biological and psychological strengths and deficits alongside community strengths and deficits. Consequently, such a re-conceptualisation of SEN has led to a strong movement away from placement in segregated settings for children with SEN towards enhanced integration into regular classes.

As of 2017, when this study was written, the common definition of special education incorporated the use of the general or organizational specially-designed curriculum, teaching materials, and facilities to help school-aged children who had been identified with special needs reach educational goals and objectives (Poon-McBrayer & Lian, 2002).

**Definition of Mainstreaming**

Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen (1990) defined mainstreaming as the popular term used for the legal doctrine of a least-restrictive environment (LRE). Although the terms mainstreaming and LRE share historical antecedents, they are not equivalent, and careless usage often leads to confusion about the LRE. In the case of severe handicaps, an educational agency may remove a student from regular class by incorporating supplementary aids and services (such as resource rooms) when the student cannot achieve satisfactory instruction in a fully mainstream setting.
To accommodate these students, a continuum of alternative placements must be available, to the extent necessary, to implement an individualized education program for each handicapped student. Alternative placements include regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. Resource rooms or itinerant instruction, in which a teacher visits and gives classes, provides a supplementary service to instruction in the regular classroom. Thus, if schools and individualized educational programs (IEPs) for students can justify a more restrictive placement than a regular classroom offers, the school may recommend this placement as acceptable, with parental consent.

Some scholars and practitioners have interpreted mainstreaming as indicating that handicapped students must have instruction in regular classroom settings which are touted to be the mainstream or normal environment. Placement in regular classrooms or in school buildings within these classrooms presumes to give handicapped students more opportunity to be in contact with non-handicapped peers, who can present behaviours for handicapped students to emulate. With successful contact, handicapped and non-handicapped students are likely to accept one another. Several reviews of the literature have discussed the historical and philosophical underpinnings of mainstreaming and of the least restrictive environment and have analysed research studies conducted in regular classroom settings (Arampatzi, Mouratidou, Evaggelinou, Koidou, & Barkoukis, 2011; Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 1990).

In the United States, educators used the term mainstreaming in the same fashion as integration. In this sense, mainstreaming means enrolling exceptional children in regular classes for the majority of the school day under the charge of a regular classroom teacher, and ensuring that the exceptional child receives high quality special education to the extent needed during that time and at any other time (Hurt, 1988). The emphasis
here is placed on the time, duration, and location of integration, all which are supported by the regular classroom teacher and by the provision of additional high quality special education. This can put children with special needs, children without special needs, and regular classroom teachers in a very difficult situation if adequate staff, resources, and capacity for adaptation are not secured (Godeau et al., 2010; Sin & Tao, 2000).

Commonly, the words mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion are used interchangeably despite their different definitions and implications. For example, in the concept of mainstreaming, if children were to join the regular classroom environment, obviously they were not part of it from the outset; they are being added to existing programs for children who develop more typically. In this scenario, students with disabilities often receive minimal support. Increasing mainstreaming usually has meant that children with disabilities spend greater amounts of time in a regular classroom (T. J. Proctor & Baker, 1995; Tavares, 2011).

**Definition of Inclusion/Inclusive and Integration Education**

Inclusion is a term that has already gained currency in North America, particularly in the United States. The use of the term inclusion began as a more precise way of describing what British educationalists called *functional integration*, or integration that involved the child with special needs having a curriculum, rather than merely social involvement with his mainstream peers. The term inclusion, however, embraced a much deeper philosophical notion of what integration should mean and, in this sense, it was truly prescriptive. Perhaps the best way to characterize this difference is by recognizing that British commentators merely noted the various kinds of integration they saw around them and coined terms to describe what was happening; hence, as previously noted, the distinctions believed to be important were social, locational, and functional integration.
However, the term inclusive education has roots in prescription, rather than in mere description. The American proponents of full inclusion for all children (Forlin, 2010b; Forlin & Loreman, 2014; Villa, Thousand, Stainback, & Stainback, 1992) took as their starting point the basic human right that children should not be excluded from the educational mainstream. Thus, from the outset, the meaning of inclusion was linked to notions of social justice and community presence and participation. Further, Fitzgerald (1994) argued that inclusive education involved much more than simply physically accepting a child into the classroom. It meant accepting and welcoming the whole child and making a commitment to meeting his or her individual needs within the classroom community.

Inclusion is an educational practice based on a notion of social justice that advocates access to equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of the presence of a disability. Inclusion involves students with disabilities learning alongside their peers in regular schools, all of whom adapt and change the way they work to meet the needs of all students (Forlin, 2012; Sailor & Skrtic, 1995, cited in U. Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006). Thus, successful inclusion requires commitment from a range of stakeholders, including governments, teacher training institutions, schools, teachers, and the school community.

Models of Inclusive Education

This section covers current views of integration education and provides the selection of a particular model. The section reviews the strengths and weaknesses of the models. People have accepted different theories about special educational needs, which illustrate three models of thinking: (a) the psycho-medical model, (b) the sociological model, and c) The organizational model.
The first model, the psycho-medical model, views special needs as resulting from some sort of deficiency in the psychological or neurological characteristics of the child. Skidmore (1996) said that ‘this model equates special educational needs with an ailment or a medical condition’ (p. 35). Therefore, the model recommends that intervention and screening take a medical form.

The second model, the sociological model, attributes special educational needs to the occurrence of social inequalities; for example, the educational system keeps children with special education needs in an inferior educational setting. Low (1997) noted that ‘the sociological model attributes the occurrence of special needs to society’s inability to meet pupils’ needs’ (p. 37). Norwich (1994) compared the psycho-medical model to the sociological model, saying that the problem lay with the individual in the former; whereas, in the latter, it lay with society and the barriers society placed against the full participation of individuals into everyday life.

The third model, the organizational model, attributes special educational needs to deficiencies within the organization of schools. Ainscow (1995), for example, advised the total reform and re-arrangement of schools to meet the needs of pupils with special needs. Similarly, Ebersold (2003) argued that different groups of professionals objectively struggled to define the problem of the special needs child as well as the goal to be reached by this population. The medical doctor might consider the child’s school ability in reference to the child’s physical or psychological impairment and the resulting loss of capacities. The teacher might consider the child’s problem to be a lack of educational skills, and therefore would contend that it is not possible for him or her to access regular classroom activities.
As Skidmore (1996) pointed out, each of these models. For example, while some genetic medical conditions do result in the occurrence of special educational needs, there are also forms of SEN for which there are no medical or psychological causes.

Second, the sociological model had an important effect on changing ideas about the inevitability of placing pupils with special educational needs in special schools. It was also instrumental in raising awareness of the negative effect of attaching stigmatizing labels to pupils with special educational needs. This model also gave rise to the debate about whether or not special schools should be maintained alongside and separated from mainstream schools. However, as Skidmore (1996) noted, much of the sociological model thinking was theoretical and abstract, trying to apply broader social theories to special education. The organizational model, meanwhile, drew attention to the important role that the characteristics of schools and classrooms play in affecting the education of pupils with special educational needs. Both the psycho-medical and sociological models seemed to disregard the instrumental role played by educators and schools.

Sharma (1998) provided an account of processes involved in the planning of inclusive education in multi-grade schools. She stressed the importance of teachers’ planning, appropriate use of space (pointing out appropriate seating arrangements for disabled and non-disabled children), and analysed factors related to time and energy. She elucidated a range of models, such as the shift method and individual coaching, among others. However, all her models are anecdotal in nature; the study consists largely of her commentary, unsubstantiated by experience, empirical evidence, or scholarly literature.

Farrell (2000), meanwhile, linked previous actions in the arena of special education in the United Kingdom to innovative projects developed under the auspices
of UNESCO in the early 1990s. The UNESCO teacher education project—special needs in the classroom, developed by a team of international experts under the direction of Sebba and Ainscow (1996)—provided important ideas and materials for new directions on special needs education that emanated from the Salamanca Conference in 1994. Based on this, the United Kingdom represented an interesting case for further exploring the meaning of inclusion in the West, post-Salamanca.

In their presentation on inclusion, Sebba and Ainscow (1996) stated that integration:

- was a process (rather than a state) by which a school attempted to respond to all pupils as individuals;
- regarded inclusion and exclusion as connected processes and advocated that schools developing more inclusive practices might need to consider both;
- emphasized the reconstructing of curricular provision in order to reach out to all pupils as individuals; and
- was relevant to all phases and types of schools, possibly including special schools, since within any educational provision, teachers faced groups of students with diverse needs and had to respond to this diversity.

**Hong Kong Policy and Development of Integrated Programs**

Hong Kong is a place where citizens and also the government share and adopt different cultures and philosophies. Hong Kong became a British Colony in 1843 but, in 1997, its sovereignty returned to the People’s Republic of China. Colonialism and the decolonisation of Hong Kong have inevitably had major influences on the educational system in general and, more specifically, on the curriculum. In Hong Kong, the government began to develop special education programs in the 1960s. The Education Department (the former name of the department that managed educational services)
established the Special Education Section in 1960. Furthermore, the government’s policy initiatives on the needs of young children with disabilities concentrated on school-aged children at the primary and secondary levels, but they did not address the pre-primary stage.

The development of integrated education in Hong Kong is traceable to the 1970s, when there was an increase of awareness regarding the rights of learners with disabilities enrolled in the public education system. An initial stage of development explored the possibility of mainstreaming. At that time, the Education Department set policy and guidelines for schools regarding how to try, as much as possible, to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream schools and how to offer appropriate education for them when they shared an environment with their same-age peers (Poon-McBrayer & Lian, 2002).

The recommended policy on integration was first outlined in 1977; it was significantly influenced by the United Kingdom’s movement towards integration (Sin & Tao, 2000, p. 66). The White Paper on Integrating the Disabled into the Community adopted the same tone as the British policy, which stated that ‘disabled children who were studying in special who were studying in education setting should be integrated into ordinary schools wherever possible’ (Hong Kong Government, 1977).

The Hong Kong government started the integrated program a decade later. The 1986 Annual Report of the Education Department (Education Commission, 1986) first documented the notion of integration by creating a special class for school-aged children with hearing impairment in a mainstream school, which was a proposal that had been initiated in 1977. That same year, the Hong Kong government issued its first White Paper on Rehabilitation: Integrating the Disabled into Community: A United Effort (Hong Kong Government, 1977). The main objective of the rehabilitation services outlined in the
White Paper was to provide children with sufficient education and training so they could develop their potential and achieve as much independence and acceptance in the community as possible. This was the first attempt to embrace the concept of serving young children with disabilities from pre-to-secondary school levels, and the government subsequently promoted the education of young children with disabilities in mainstream settings.

In 1978, the Hong Kong government develop the long-term development of an integrated program. Through this endeavour, the government encouraged mainstream childcare centres to admit young children between the ages of 2 and 6 with mild mental handicaps and mild-to-moderate physical handicaps into their settings to provide them with an integrated environment for care and education with non-disabled children.

In the same decade, the British government strived to enforce the rights of young children with disabilities, for example, with the enactment of the 1970 Education Act, which stated that all children had the right to an education (Wolfendale, 1997). In addition, the 1978 Warnock Report recommended that teacher training and increased provision should take priority for children with special needs under the age of 5, with an emphasis on intervention programs (Wolfendale, 1997). Though the United Kingdom was formerly sovereign over Hong Kong and had an important influence on policy, the Hong Kong government never went beyond encouraging privately operated and run mainstream childcare centres to admit young children with mild mental handicaps and mild-to-moderate physical handicaps into their settings.

Integrated kindergartens commenced in 1985, after the government suggested implementing a two-year project (Hong Kong Government, 1984). After the two-year pilot project, the Hong Kong government reported that the integrated kindergartens should continue to serve young, mildly disabled children from age 3 to 6. A shortage of
integrated childcare centres was the main reason for starting the integrated program in kindergartens. However, the government phased out the service starting in the 2005-2006 school year because of the unification of kindergarten and childcare sectors.

During the same decade, the number of young disabled children in integration classrooms increased. In the United Kingdom, the integration of young disabled children was strengthened through legislation. For example, the ‘1981 Education Act’ implemented the findings of the Warnock Report (1987), which advocated that disabled children should be in mainstream schools (Dickins & Denziloe, 2003).

Although Hong Kong had established its integrated program in kindergarten by the 1980s, this remained at the encouragement stage. The most significant differences between the programs in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong were the laws concerning the integration policy and the benefits for young disabled children, which were not present in Hong Kong.

The 1995 White Paper on Rehabilitation issued by the Hong Kong government, Equal Opportunities and Full Participation: A Better Tomorrow for All, advocated that:

Children with disabilities are encouraged to receive education in mainstream school to integrate disabled students as far as possible and as early as possible. Teachers and students in mainstream schools must learn to accept that disabled students have the right to be there. (Hong Kong Government, 1995, p. 52)

The statement showed the government’s goal of encouraging mainstream schools to integrate disabled students as well as possible, and as early as possible; however, it provided no guidelines for doing so.

Upon entering the new millennium in 2000, the Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission revised the Disability Discrimination Ordinance: Code of Practice on Education. The revised ordinance became effective in July 2001 as an aid to the providers and recipients of education services. It offered practical guidelines on how to comply
with the legal requirements on education for disabled people at all educational levels. This code was also ‘in line with the world movement on integration education’ (Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission, 2001, Chairperson’s foreword, para. 5).

The harmonization of early childhood education services centralized resources in an effective way. Consequently, the Hong Kong government terminated the operation of the integrated program in kindergartens in the 2005-2006 school year (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2003). The policy showed that the government was unwilling to invest resources in the development of integration in preschools.

For this reason, integration policy in Hong Kong is far behind that of the United Kingdom even though Hong Kong was a British colony and the concept of integration stemmed from the British plan. For instance, the UK formulated a set of laws to protect the rights of young disabled children in preschools. The British government took a great step forward with the idea of equal opportunity, reinforced by the need to move from integration to inclusion to welcoming all young children, regardless of their abilities, to study in all mainstream preschools starting in the 21st century. However, in Hong Kong, government policy still restricts admission to young children who have only mild-to-moderate grade disabilities in some mainstream preschools.

As this history has shown, policy, perceptions, and attitudes of teaching staff play important roles in integrating young disabled children and in providing essential factors for their success or failure when implementing integrated education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Bricker, 2000; Galant & Hanline, 1993; Green & Stoneman, 1989; R. Smith & Leonard, 2005). Hence, personal beliefs and positive attitudes about integration amongst teaching staff are significant indicators in establishing successful integrated education for disabled children. Investigating this is one purpose of the current study.
The Current Practices of the Integrated Program

In the mid-1970s, the Hong Kong government formulated services for the disabled population, including identification and assessment, medical treatment, training and rehabilitation facilities, educational training, social welfare services, and financial assistance.

The Integrated Program for Young Children with Disabilities

While all childcare centres are private, most receive a subsidy from the government’s integrated program, which offers training and care to young children between 2 and 6 years old who have mild mental handicaps, mild-to-moderate physical handicaps, or sensory impairments (Social Welfare Department, 2001). The integrated program facilitates integration into mainstream preschools so the children will have a better chance of future integration into mainstream primary and secondary education (Health and Welfare Bureau, 2007).

Each integrated preschool can operate one to four integrated program units. (Social Welfare Department, 2008b). Each integrated program unit takes care of six mildly disabled young children and provides a special education teacher to deliver special training in individual and group sessions (Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2005).

The Individualized Educational Plan and Quality Assurance Mechanisms

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) requires the special education teachers to tailor and implement Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), which include individual programs and small group activities for each of the young disabled children (Social Welfare Department, 2001). The SWD’s IEP requirements ask the teachers to provide either 30 to 45 minutes of small group activity or 10 to 20 minutes of an individual program for each disabled child daily (Social Welfare Department, 2001). For the rest of
the school day, the young disabled child should learn and play with non-disabled peers in a mainstream classroom.

The integrated program includes daily school training activities for the young disabled children and meetings with their parents to share techniques for training their children at home (Social Welfare Department, 2001). To provide and ensure quality programs for the individual child, the special education teachers must communicate and cooperate with professionals (e.g., therapists and psychologists), other colleagues (e.g., mainstream teachers), and parents of young disabled children (Social Welfare Department, 2001).

**Constructs Influencing Teaching Staff Perceptions and Attitudes**

The perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff are vital in ensuring the success of preschool integration for young disabled children because their understanding and acceptance of the integrated program may influence their involvement in, and commitment to, its implementation (Green & Stoneman, 1989; Guralnick, 1999; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; Male, 2011; McLean, 1990; Seçer, 2010; Stoneman, 2001). In their study of primary teachers in Hong Kong, Leung and Mak (2010) reported similar findings, with teachers commenting that the professional training available was inadequate and that they urgently required training in class-management skills so they could implement inclusive practices. Blecker and Boakes (2010) observed that allowing teachers time for strategic planning could promote more effective collaboration. In addition, insufficient professional development for mainstream teachers may prolong and preserve negative attitudes towards students with special educational needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

Research studies have confirmed that the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards the integration of young disabled children was one of the most important
factors for success or failure in implementing integrated education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer et al., 2011; Green & Stoneman, 1989). Additionally, the personal perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff pertaining to integration were significant indicators in establishing successful integrated education for young disabled children; these findings were replicated in the current study. The availability of human support was consistently found to be associated with positive attitudes about inclusion (Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick & West, 2013). A positive school spirit and positive attitudes of staff within a school are factors that usually contribute significantly to the success of inclusion (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Training for teaching staff has been shown to develop their knowledge of special educational needs and of the pedagogic strategies that are appropriate to supporting all students’ learning (Shevlin et al., 2013).

**Benefits and Weaknesses for Young Children with and without Disabilities**

An integrated setting can provide young disabled children with the opportunity to experience the real world with their non-disabled peers (Galant & Hanline, 1993; McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2012; Turnbull & Winton, 1983). Consequently, they can improve in different developmental areas, such as language and communication, social skills, cognitive and motor abilities, problem solving, and decision making skills. Researchers have demonstrated a relationship between integration within the classroom and ‘the quality of life of citizens with disabilities’ (Van Hove, 1999, p. 153, cited in Killoran, Tymon, & Frempong, 2007, p. 82). Furthermore, Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, and Monsen (2004), Galant and Hanline (1993), Green and Stoneman (1989), and Sasha (2013) all highlighted similar issues. In these studies, parents and teachers appeared primarily interested in improvements in the children’s social and behavioural development after integrating young disabled children with a group of non-disabled children of the same age. For example, they noted improvements in self-concept, higher
levels of social play, and more appropriate social interaction. Therefore, it appears that the formation of social abilities is an important and achievable goal for young disabled children in integrated settings.

According to various researchers, teaching staff observed that participating in the integrated program in mainstream settings could offer young disabled children balanced development in areas such as their cognitive, language, motor, social, emotional, and self-care skills (Allen & Cowdery, 2014; Diamond, Hestense, & O’Connor, 1994; Killoran et al., 2007). In order to successfully include children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, educators must understand the principles of integrating children with and without disabilities. The integrated education teacher must acquire the necessary disposition, skills, and knowledge if they are to meet the needs of disabled children (Rogers-Adkinson & Fridley, 2016).

Young children without disabilities show improvements in social and cooperation skills in integrated settings, along with acceptance of those with disabilities (Diamond et al., 1994; Killoran et al., 2007; Lieber, et al., 1998; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). In addition, empirical research into the views of teaching staff and parents about integration has also found that, within the integrated setting, young children without disabilities could learn from others and gain important values, including being more considerate to their peers with disabilities, having more knowledge about disabled people, and gaining greater competence in helping others (Green & Stoneman; 1989; Kemp, Kishida, Carter, & Sweller, 2013; L. J. Miller et al., 1992).

Even though integration can provide many benefits for young disabled children, some drawbacks also exist. For instance, Turnbull and Winton (1983) investigated programs operating in special and mainstream preschools from the perspectives of parents of young disabled children. The findings showed that, although mothers
perceived that their young disabled children benefited from the integrated setting, they also perceived a substantial number of drawbacks, especially related to concerns over peer rejection and the lower academic achievement of their children.

**Professional Training and Development in Early Childhood Special Education**

Many researchers supported providing substantial amounts of professional training in early childhood special education (ECSE) to teaching staff in mainstream settings with integrated programs to ensure that quality service and programs would be offered to young disabled children and the people around them (Knoche, Peterson, Edwards, & Jeor, 2006; Rae, McKenzie, & Murray, 2011). They found that the absence of the necessary skills and training could be detrimental to managing daily practices in mainstream environments in integrated programs. In addition to providing training courses for special education teachers from time to time, it is also important to provide mainstream teachers with professional training courses about special education.

Bleck & Boakes (2010) surveyed 546 teachers from 54 schools in southern New Jersey, United States, to determine whether they displayed the disposition, knowledge, and skills necessary to implement inclusive education. The survey revealed significant differences in attitude and teaching skills between special education teachers and mainstream teachers concerning their readiness for ‘inclusion’. The analysis concluded that children with disabilities clearly profit from interactions with non-disabled peers. Although special education teachers appear more knowledgeable about inclusive practices, they are more likely to argue for the benefits of a segregated environment. Mainstream teachers also voiced the need for increased administrative support, planning time, and professional development opportunities.

Teaching staff and principals can benefit from ECSE training because they are the gatekeepers for integrated programs and play an important role in supporting effective
implementation (Rae et al., 2011; Soodak, et al., 2002). Unianu (2012) advocated for more adequate training for integrated program teachers in mainstream preschools. These teachers also needed more help from colleagues, more time for preparing educational activities, and better understanding of practical implementation strategies.

**Professional Support**

Professional support from psychologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, and social workers directly affects the level of success these programs can attain (Odom & McEvoy, 1990). Bennett et al. (1998) interviewed 18 parents of young disabled children in the United States about their perceptions of preschool integration. The results indicated that parents recognized the need for their young children to be exposed to the real world and the community through living in integrated settings. They also stressed that continuing therapy services were important for their children. Professional resources provide teaching staff with appropriate knowledge and assistance to deal with any challenges they may encounter while implementing an integrated program (Bennett et al., 1998). In addition, co-consultants learned from teachers and family members about each child’s developmental functioning during typical daily routines. The purpose of information gathering is to develop a functional intervention plan, including curriculum–based assessments (Bagnato, Neisworth, & Petti-Frontczak, 2010). To provide quality therapy for young disabled children, professionals in integrated preschools usually implement an integrated therapy approach. Professional therapists can participate in the daily functional life of a young child, including at school, where the young children spend a significant period of their lives, as well as in his or her family home. Preschool teachers also agree that a transdisciplinary team approach is an effective way to deliver the best therapy for young children (Lindqvist, Nilholm, Almqvist & Wetso, 2011; Mackey &
McQueen, 1998; Sekerak, Kirkpatrick, Nelson, & Propes, 2003; T. M. Smith & Duncan, 2004). The transdisciplinary team approach provides services in different disciplines in an integrated manner, incorporating various educational and therapeutic techniques (Cook, Klein, & Tessier, 2007; McWilliam, 1996; Wolfendale, 2000).

Effgen and Kaminker (2014) argued for the efficacy of related professional services working together with all school and family team members in developing disabled children’s IEPs. Such collaborative planning should promote the student’s and family’s independence but ensure interdependence in following the children’s learning. This current study explored this key issue as it related to Hong Kong.

**Funding and Resources**

Sufficient funding is an important component of maintaining and implementing a quality program for young disabled children (Buysse, Wesley, Bryant, & Gardner, 1999; Esposito & Peach, 1983; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; G. Llewellyn, Thompson, & Fante, 2002; Onaga & Martoccio, 2008). Funding is essential for staff, equipment, supplies, and service administration to meet the needs of young disabled children and their families (Gottwald & Pardy, 1997; Killoran et al., 2007; T. E. Smith et al., 2015; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

Frederickson et al. (2004) found that in the UK, teaching staff, rather than parents, viewed financial and physical resources as vitally important. Teaching staff stressed that funding could help integrated preschools purchase updated teaching and learning materials that were needed to stimulate learning, create indoor and outdoor activities for disabled children and their families, and recruit more support staff. Hence, for teachers as well as parents, lack of funding and resources could be barriers contributing to negative feelings and attitudes.
Okongo, Ngao, Rop, and Nyongesa (2015) found that adequacy of teaching and learning resources can enhance inclusive education. This includes acceptable quality and quantity of materials, physical facilities, and human resources for implementing inclusive education in pre-primary education. This issue is further explored in this study of Hong Kong KCCCCs.

**Curriculum and Strategies**

The quality and nature of the program and the quality of the environment are two dimensions aligned with the quality of preschool integration (Odom, 2000; Odom & Bailey, 2001). Hence, curriculum and strategies play a significant role in influencing and facilitating the effectiveness of integrated programs for young disabled children (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Cook et al., 2007; Fewell & Oelwein, 1990; Odom & Bailey, 2001; Strain, 1990). Many researchers also mentioned that teachers should design a systematic plan to facilitate developing social interaction among young children with and without disabilities (Ferraioli & Harris, 2011; LaParo, Sexton, & Snyder, 1998; Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2014).

In order to include and enhance the interaction of non-disabled peers with young children with disabilities, teachers must provide a variety of strategies, such as small group instruction and cooperative learning (Diamond & Innes, 2001). In addition, mainstream teachers should interact more with young disabled children because teachers’ interactions can facilitate children’s social and task mastery. Furthermore, in order to help young disabled children during mainstream classes, special education teachers need to provide in-class training and support (File, 1994; Hauser-Cram, Branson, & Upshur, 1993; Korthagen, 2010; Lemer, Lowenthal, & Egan, 2003; Nabors, Badawi, & Cheney, 1997).
Florian and Linklater (2010) argued that we must prepare mainstream classroom teachers to include children with disabilities. Inclusion needs to be seen as part of the routine of classroom life and as a way of responding to differences between learners. It represents a shift in thinking about teaching and learning from that which works for most learners to also include something different or additional for those who experience difficulties. The shift is to a teaching and learning approach that involves creating a rich learning environment characterized by lesson and learning opportunities that are sufficiently accessible to everyone so that all are able to participate in classroom life. Teachers thus have a responsibility to support the integrated environment in a collaborative manner, allocate available human and material resources, and make equitable decisions regarding application of resources to meet the needs of the children (Bowe, 2007; R. Smith & Leonard, 2005; T. E. Smith et al., 2015).

In integrated settings, apart from being involved in mainstream classroom activities, most young disabled children also participate in individualized educational plans (IEPs). The Hong Kong government requires integrated preschools to design and implement IEPs for their young disabled children (Social Welfare Department, 2001). IEPs are specialized program designs used for teaching young disabled children who participate in integrated programs (Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2013; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; Templeman, Fredericks, & Udell, 1989). Preschool teachers need more information and skills, especially related to creating IEPs, differentiating preschool curriculum for children with disabilities, and developing instructional strategies that facilitate teaching in general education classrooms (Fuchs, 2010; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011).

It is very important to prepare and implement individualized education plans (IEPs) in order to solve or minimize these problems. The IEPs describe where, when, and
by whom the special education services will be provided; how long they will take; and for what reasons and to achieve which objectives. When special education teachers implement an IEP, they need flexibility to help the disabled child meet developmental stages, learn skills, and monitor their progress through daily assessments and curriculum (Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Petriwskyj, 2010; Wolery, 1994b).

These largely international research findings suggest that the perceptions and attitudes of Hong Kong teaching staff towards KCCCC integration, such as understanding the individual development and differences among children, may influence their acceptance of, involvement in, and commitment to the integrated program. Hong Kong teachers’ perceptions may significantly influence the progress of the integrated program and the children who participate in the programs. The current study investigated Hong Kong teaching staff perceptions and attitudes, curriculum and teaching strategies, and government policies in order to make recommendations which would improve and facilitate learning for children with disabilities.

Environment

Teachers are able to arrange their integrated environment in an attractive, stimulating way to facilitate disabled children’s learning, playing, and communicating with both their peers and adults (Odom & Bailey, 2001). Furthermore, preschool settings can facilitate a quality environment that helps children learn and develop (McWilliam, Wolery, & Odom, 2001; O’Brien, 2001; Odom & Bailey, 2001).

Sufficient space for activities in an integrated preschool can directly influence young children’s participation and affect the children’s interaction (Odom & Bailey, 2001). An active learning environment is highly important in inclusive early childhood education (Allen & Cowdery, 2014). Hence, adequacy of equipment and teaching materials, such as furniture, sandboxes, learning or playing area/corner (such as the home corner, library
comer, block area, and art area), and various materials to encourage young children’s learning and interaction with peers, is essential. Structural elements in preschool can significantly enhance a sense of autonomy and safety. Students can be active learners when the structural learning environment elements are relevant to their needs (Agbenyega, 2011).

An effective inclusive education for young children should consider the teacher to child ratio. Small class sizes may lead to positive outcomes in teacher-child relationships and classroom practice. Low teacher-child ratios and small class size are associated with high quality practice because teachers are able to provide individual attention (Huntsman, 2008; Ilija, 2015).

In sum, placing young children with disabilities into mainstream preschools with integrated programs is not simply a case of teachers getting the job done. In fact, teachers serve as vital role models for young children when they implement daily practices in integrated environments. The research reviewed here suggests that all teaching staff should review their existing curriculum and individual education plans regularly. If the government provided clear instructions and guidelines for implementing the integrated program, it is likely that the preschools could run the programs more easily and smoothly.

**Home-School Partnerships**

Parental involvement is one of the most important influences on a young child’s growth and development because parents are the primary source of nurturing for young children (Allen & Cowdery, 2014; Erwin et al., 2001; Gottwald & Pardy, 1997; Stoneman & Rugg, 2004). When teachers and parents communicate and discuss the child’s progress, if a problem occurs, they can facilitate addressing the problem in a way that benefits the child (Margetts & Raban-Bisby, 2011). Additionally, teaching staff and parents of disabled
children should work as partners to provide quality programs (Cornwell & Korteland, 1997; Fish, 2006). Mak & Zhang (2013) reported that the Heep Hong society (HHS) developed a training program in 2009 for enhancing Hong Kong community participation among individuals with autism. HHS asserts that community participation extends the integration of children with disabilities into all psychological and physical environmental aspects of a residential building, including public areas and recreational facilities. Helping children with disabilities become part of the community is the essence of inclusive education. This philosophy of inclusion has had a growing influence on the education of people with special needs in Hong Kong in the past few decades.

Research and practice suggests that preschool teachers should introduce the student into the classroom when no other students are there. The child should have this initial opportunity to recognize the physical conditions of the classroom while accompanied by her or his parents. This facilitates the child’s adaption to the environment. Making the families a part of the education sources contributes to replicating the knowledge and skills developed at home (Özyürek, 2012). Due to the limitation of the scope of this study, it was not possible to explore the home-partnership issue by interviewing parents; however, the issues mentioned above merit further study.

Other Factors

In addition to the influences discussed so far, there are many other factors that contribute to successful integration, such as educating the public and monitoring programs.

**Educating the public.** The concepts of basic human rights, equity, social justice, anti-discrimination, and equal opportunity for young disabled children have formed the underlying principles documented in other research studies (Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick, & West, 2013; Kirk et al., 2006; Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2012; UNESCO, 1994, 2007).
Based on the literature reviewed here, educating the public is important and plays a significant role in early childhood education, the efficacy of early intervention and integration, and the strategies used to interact with young disabled children. Public education can build a sense of belonging and having connections to the community (Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, & Schertz, 2001). These strategies can provide the public with a greater understanding of young disabled children and their rights. In addition, people need to know that the integrated program offered in mainstream preschools not only benefits young disabled children, but also offers advantages to their learning peers and their parents. Also, through public education about preschool integration, people in the broader society can learn that early intervention programs, such as the integrated program, helps the government save on expenditures for the disabled (Erwin et al., 2012; Lai, 2007; Majnemer, 1998). If young disabled children can acquire appropriate help and early intervention, it can enhance their development. Expenditures for the disabled can then be decreased. Public education can also help integrated preschools gain the funding necessary to promote effective programs and services for young disabled children (Gottwald & Pardy, 1997; Scior, Kan, McLoughlin, & Sheridan, 2010).

**Monitoring the program.** It has been argued that a well-structured government monitoring program should help maintain the quality of the integrated program operating in mainstream preschools (Lai, 2006, 2007). Regular monitoring of the program and comments provided by qualified government inspectors or professionals could help the teaching staff in integrated preschools gain insight into maintaining the programs in an effective way (Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2013).

**Hong Kong Viewpoints on Integration and Disabilities**

Having reviewed relevant worldwide literature on the perceptions and practices of teaching staff concerning preschool integration for young disabled children, we now
examine the relatively few research studies on integrating young disabled children into
Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs.

Crawford et al. (1999) conducted two surveys during the first and second year of
an integration pilot project for school-aged students. The findings showed that an
increasing number of Hong Kong special education teachers noted that disabled
students could derive greater benefits from the integrated program than they could from
the segregated program. Also, more than one-third of teachers agreed that integration
was beneficial for non-disabled students. When special education teachers were asked
whether they would like their disabled students to be placed in integrated classrooms,
one in five teachers said that they would not. However, teachers expressed more
positive attitudes towards integrating those with physical disabilities and mild health or
speech problems because these students of normal or above average intelligence did
not cause disciplinary problems. In those instances, the teachers could understand what
students needed to do and what students had learned in mainstream classrooms.

Several studies indicated that the reasons the Hong Kong teaching staff tended
to be reluctant to integrate disabled school-aged students into mainstream classrooms
was because they were concerned about such issues as insufficient teacher training, rigid
curriculum, inadequate resources and facilities, heavy workload, space limitations, and
lack of evaluation (Chong, Forlin, & Au, 2007; Dowson et al., 2003; Poon-McBrayer, 2004).
Forlin (2010a) argued that developing an effective inclusive school culture in Hong Kong
requires school leaders who have a strong vision and belief about the practice of
inclusive education, who can encourage their professional colleagues the professionals
to engage, and who have the authority to make decisions that reflect the best interests
of their schools.
The relatively sparse literature and research about integration and disability from the perspective of teaching staff in Hong Kong’s mainstream primary and secondary schools, as well as my own research, have, thus, led me to undertake this research project into perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards young children with disabilities and their integration into mainstream KCCCCs and classrooms.

**Conclusion**

Hong Kong has been integrating disabled children into mainstream KCCCCs to some degree since the Second World War. Integration of young children with disabilities into mainstream preschools developed around three models, namely the psycho-medical model, the sociological model, and the organizational model.

International research suggests that the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff towards preschool integration may influence their acceptance of and commitment to the integrated program. In order to understand the thinking of teaching staff in mainstream preschools about integration of young children with disabilities, the current study adopted the framework developed by Skidmore (1996) to examine the perceptions and attitudes of teaching staff about integration.

The British influenced Hong Kong preschool education; however, the development of KCCCC integration in Hong Kong is still far behind that of the United Kingdom. For instance, all young children, regardless of their abilities, have been welcome to study in all mainstream preschools in the United Kingdom since 2000; whereas the Hong Kong government still restricts admission to young children whose disabilities range from mild to moderate, and in only some mainstream KCCCCs.

Young disabled children still need to wait a long time for admission into an integrated KCCCC to gain professional support from occupational therapist and physiotherapist services. Furthermore, the government offers little sponsorship for staff
training for early childhood special education, and the families of young children with disabilities only receive vague and ineffective quality assurance mechanisms about KCCCCC integration. All of these factors influence the effectiveness of the implementation of the integrated program offered in Hong Kong’s mainstream KCCCCs. In order to examine current provisions of integrated programs in Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs, this study interviewed 28 teaching staff, including principals, special education teachers, and mainstream teachers. Case studies offered further insights into current practice. Talking with the teaching staff and examining KCCCC documents about the integrated program revealed insights into the practice of integration at the KCCCCs. In addition, the study evaluated the government policy on KCCCC integration.

Through reviewing earlier research papers about the Hong Kong integrated programs for school-aged students with disabilities, it appeared that many teaching staff and parents in Hong Kong viewed the integrated programs for disabled students in mainstream primary and secondary schools as ineffective because they received insufficient support (e.g., in terms of teaching training, resources and facilities, space limitations, and guidance) from the government. In addition, for a number of reasons, including the fact that Hong Kong is an academically-oriented city that adopts strict discipline for education, many teaching staff in mainstream primary and secondary school were unwilling to accept students with mental handicaps and social or behavioural problems. In sum, because there is little research about preschool integration for young children with disabilities in Hong Kong, this study investigated the perceptions of the teaching staff about integration programs, including the benefits and weaknesses of such programs, current daily practices (curriculum and the professional support), and made recommendations for future integrated programs.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology applied in the study and presents detailed information about the procedures used in different stages of the study.

The researcher chose a design that would allow her to gather rich data from the selected KCCCCs in Hong Kong to document and understand teachers’ perceptions and beliefs in their daily practices in regards to students with special needs. An interpretive paradigm is suitable for this study in that a ‘paradigm is a way to “see” the world and organize it into a coherent whole’ (Hughes, 2001, p. 31). Accordingly, each paradigm organizes a set of particular beliefs about the nature of knowledge and the relationship between knowledge and daily practices (Hughes, 2001).

The foci of the study included investigating the perceptions and beliefs of teaching staff at KCCCCs with integrated programs and outlining the benefits and weaknesses of the program for young disabled children and the people around them, such as peers, parents, and teachers. An interpretive paradigm examines the way in which people perceive and understand their social world (Gall et al., 2003; Holmes-Roberts, 2005; Hughes, 2001; Punch, 2013, 2014; Wellington, 2000). Hence, because the current study focused on participants’ attitudes and their daily practices, this approach was desirable.

Research Design

Interpretive researchers have posited that persons continually work with others to create and construct the social world, which includes acquiring a cultural understanding of situations and negotiations with participants regarding the meaning of actions (Glesne, 1999; Holmes-Roberts, 2005; Hughes, 2001; Seidman, 2013). Given that this study focused on participants’ functional roles, responsibilities, and perceptions
regarding educational integration policies and practices, this approach was deemed methodologically suitable.

Because the data for this study was derived largely from interviews, it falls within the parameters of a qualitative study. Qualitative research focuses on investigating a social entity in its natural setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Glesne, 1999; Hara, 1995), provides an in-depth understanding of the social entity (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Merriam, 1998b; Skinner, Tagg & Holloway, 2000), and probes experiences of the participants more deeply than other methods, such as surveys. Qualitative research concentrates on understanding an individual’s thinking about the world (Bell, 1999; Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 1996; Glesne, 2011; Ong & Coady, 2006), emphasizing the ‘meanings, experiences, descriptions and so on’ (Coolican, 1999, p. 41). Thus, the current study explored integration education as a social world, utilizing primarily interviews for data collection and case studies for analysis.

Qualitative research can explore substantive areas about which little is known to gain narrative understandings (Stern, 1980, cited in Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Other than studies conducted by Lai (2004, 2006) and Cheuk (2007), no qualitative empirical research on KCCCCC integration in Hong Kong existed at the time this study took place.

According to scholars such as Creswell (2003), Denzin and Lincoln (2005b), and Mertens (2005), the constructivist paradigm allows participants to initially construct meaning as they interpret their own experiences. Subsequently, the researcher interprets the participants’ meaning-making to produce new knowledge collaboratively. Because a qualitative approach endorses adopting an open and flexible research procedure, it permits an understanding of the subtleties, problems, and emergent qualities that may arise as the study proceeds; it also leaves room for the researcher to develop and refine themes or categories to characterize and analyse the data obtained.
In this study, interviews provided detailed information about participants’ (teaching staff) experiences and viewpoints on integration education in involving young children with disabilities in Hong Kong KCCCCs. The interviews, following an in-depth literature review, allowed the researcher to document and understand what teachers do, why they do it, and how they describe their feelings regarding their daily practice.

**Sampling**

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that in qualitative methodology researchers usually study small samples of people in-depth in a specific context. The cases in this study consisted of purposefully selected samples from which the researcher could gather information on the foci of the study. The researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the study, the procedures of the investigation, the role of the researcher, the information to be collected, the mechanisms of data analysis, the confidentiality of the information, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. These efforts ensured that the participants understood that the aim of the study was not to evaluate their performance as teachers or their ability to integrate children with special needs. Over time, these explanations and the procedures themselves led to the development of a sense of trust between the participating principals and teachers and the researcher, which enhanced the experience of the participants and encouraged them to disclose their inner perceptions, feelings, and attitudes concerning inclusive early childhood education.

At the time of this study, there were approximately 1,015 kindergartens and childcare centres in Hong Kong (Education Bureau, 2008d). Of those, 210 KCCCCs were providing integrated programs. These pre-primary institutions were all privately run and categorized as non-profit making and independent. Only KCCCCs providing an integrated
setting for children aged from 2 to 6 years (pre-primary education) were included in the study.

Four non-profit KCCCCs with integrated programs providing services for mainly middle-to-lower socio-economic background families, and personnel from those institutions, constituted the study sample. Although interviews took place at the four KCCCC locations, because of time and research management constraints, participant data from only two of the schools was used in the case studies documenting and outlining integration in early childhood education programs with special needs children.

When asked to participate, the principals from the KCCCCs were enthusiastic and stated their vision regarding the benefits of integration education for children with disabilities; they enthusiastically shared their prior-experiences. Even though the research topic was sensitive, KCCCC principals and teachers appeared eager to share their experiences. The four KCCCCs served mostly children from public housing estates and private housing estates, which included mostly middle-to-lower SES (the majority SES group in Hong Kong). The median monthly household income in Hong Kong is HK$24,500 (Census and Statistics Department, 2012).

Because of constraints on time and availability, interviews included only 28 participants: 24 teachers (including seven special education teachers), 17 mainstream teachers, and four principals. Although the study did not recruit a large number of participants, it provides exploratory data that will hopefully serve as an initial attempt to examine key issues in relation to the KCCCCs that are hosting integrated programs in Hong Kong.
The four selected KCCCCs served young children with mild disabilities between 2 and 6 years old. They were non-profit institutes run by charitable or religious organizations, and they all operated whole-day sessions with a teacher-student ratio of 1:15 and an additional each special education teacher serving six young children with disabilities at a time in a group. Students received support from the government, such as para-medical support services (physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy) and psychology services. The researcher conducted focus group and individual interviews with the participating teachers and principals at their convenience.

Table 2

*Number of Participants for Interviews at each KCCCC*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Staff</th>
<th>KCCCC 1</th>
<th>KCCCC 2</th>
<th>KCCCC 3</th>
<th>KCCCC 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative team</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
<td>1 principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream teachers</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>4 teachers</td>
<td>4 teachers</td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teachers</td>
<td>1 teacher</td>
<td>2 teachers</td>
<td>2 teachers</td>
<td>1 teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Stage 1**: Unstructured and Semi-structured Interviews

Four Kindergarten-Cum-Child Care Centres

- Individual and Focus Group Interview

- KCCCC1 Interview
- KCCCC2 Interview
- KCCCC3 Interview
- KCCCC4 Interview

**Stage 2**: Case Study

Two Kindergarten-Cum-Child Care Centres

- Individual and Informal Interviews
  - Informal interview
  - Individual interview
  - Documentation

*Figure 1.* The methodology of the study.
A Case Study Design

The case study approach was an appropriate strategy for investigating the specific issues addressed in this dissertation because particularistic case studies concentrate on a particular situation, program, phenomenon, or event - for example, issues that are of concern to teachers regarding integration education in a number of specific early childhood contexts. This focus allows the researcher to study the specific research questions, situations, or perplexing events that arise in the everyday lives of the key stakeholders within the specific domain (Merriam, 1998a).

Case studies are most appropriate for investigating contexts and discovering details (Merriam, 1998a, 2014), and they capture both activities and perceptions. In Hong Kong, due to a lack of local empirical research, little was known about the understandings participants involved in integrated programs at KCCCC levels; this approach has helped the researcher begin to fill this gap by developing an account of the daily experiences of teachers. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, this dissertation explored two case studies to enhance detail and thick description.

The two schools chosen as case studies offered an integration setting for children 2 to 6 years old from families representing middle-to-lower socio-economic status backgrounds. They provided rich data in part because, in early childhood programs, teachers have more chances to collaborate and foster mutual respect between regular and special early childhood teachers and therapists.
Data Collection

Stage 1 Interview

In Stage 1, the researcher employed unstructured and semi-structured interviews, both with individuals and in focus groups, as the data collection method.

The questions asked were designed to tease out initial clarification of four key research questions:

1. What is the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practices?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings?
3. How do the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration education in such settings?
4. Based on the research literature and study findings, what are the recommendations for possible improvement of KCCCC integration?

The Study Design

Interviews

In this study, both unstructured and semi-structured interviews, appeared to be one of the most suitable ways to collect the data. The interview is one of the major tools of data collection in qualitative research, and it was the preferred way for the researcher to examine people’s thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes regarding the reality of their daily practices implementing policies and addressing concerns related to integrated education in Hong Kong KCCCCs (Punch, 2005). Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995) described three types of interviews that vary in terms of structure and depth: structured interviews, focused or semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews (see also Punch, 2005). Structured interviews are highly standardized...
(Minichiello et al., 1995) with uniform questions and a precise and detailed interview schedule. Questions proceed in a predetermined order with each respondent answering the same queries. This allows comparison with other studies and minimizes biases and differences among interviewees. Unstructured interviews, in contrast, are open-ended and conducted like a normal conversation. They rely on social interactions between the interviewer and the respondent to draw out information. Although highly unstructured, this type of interview can prompt the respondent to reveal experiences and attitudes that are relevant to the issue under study. This method was applied to the current study for both the focus group and individual interviews. Unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews allow an in-depth examination of the topics or people under study, permitting them to ‘move beyond surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings’ (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 80). Because some issues covered in a study may not be directly observable, in-depth interviews offer an opportunity to gain deep and complex insights.

Interviews were done in Cantonese and audio-taped with consent of the participants to supplement the notes taken during the conversation and to document the interviewee’s perspectives in detail (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). After each taped interview, careful data transcription ensured accuracy. Before analysis and reporting, the researcher returned the interview transcripts to the interviewees for member-checking, encouraging them to clarify their comments and to amend the document, if desired, to ensure accuracy. Issues related to Chinese and English translation are dealt with in the next section on coding.
Focus Group Interviews

The study, which incorporated a school year of around 12 months, commenced in the latter half of 2009, and included four semi-structured focus group interviews and unstructured and semi-structured individual interviews. One focus group interview was carried out at each participating KCCCC, with all the participating teaching staffs gathered together at a meeting place where they felt at ease. The discussion was centred on the specific research questions already outlined in the previous paragraphs.

The researcher refined specific subsequent research questions based on information derived from the focus group experiences. The semi-structured interviews occurred at the beginning of the semester. Through the focus group interviews, the researcher developed a working relationship with the participating teachers and principals.

Morgan and Krueger (1993) noted that the unique strength of focus group interviews is that the interviewees both query each other and explain themselves to one another. Such interactions offer valuable data on the extent of consensus and diversity among interviewees about a certain topic. Given this strength, focus group interviews best served the current research purpose of gathering preliminary data about the diversity of perspectives among Hong Kong KCCCC teachers.

In this study, each focus group interview lasted about 60-90 minutes, were conducted in Cantonese, and occurred during after-school evenings. Because teachers might have other obligations to fulfil, it was realistic to expect about half of the selected number of participants to be available.

Each focus group interview was audio-taped with supplemental notes taken by the interviewer to capture fleeting thoughts and impressions that arose. Participants responded to the research questions in the following order:
The first research question asked: What is the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practices? This formed the basis for other questions posed to each focus group and increased the researcher’s understanding of the background behind the policy recently legislated in Hong Kong concerning inclusion education in early childhood education.

The second question queried: What are the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings? This promoted greater understanding of the major issues that concerned teachers regarding inclusive education in Hong Kong pre-primary education. Concerns in this context referred to any matters that affected their views, for example, issues that occupied their interest and attention.

The third question probed: How do the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration education in such settings? The aim of this question was to investigate the activities of teachers involved in integration education at KCCCs. The question referred to people who worked within the pre-primary level and the government, and how they thought and felt about inclusive education. This addressed not only the activities officially assigned to them, but also actions and behaviours they elected to pursue on their own, including those they chose to ignore or reshape according to their own beliefs and values. This aspect of the research also required the researcher to acquire an official view of requirements through document analysis, and also record and outline the teachers’ perspectives through interviews.

**Individual In-Depth Interviews**

Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted after the focus group. According to W. L. Miller and Crabtree (2004), the method of in-depth interviews is a particular data-gathering process designed to generate narrative focused on specific
research questions. Accordingly, in-depth interviews usually make use of open, direct, verbal questioning to elicit personal stories and case-oriented narratives from the interviewees. In addition, the researcher reminded the participants that, according to the informed consent notice, they had the right to terminate participation at any time and that if so she would discard the data collected. Through this method, researchers can attempt to capture the experiences and interpretations of the interviewees with respect to their concrete encounters with the social phenomenon under investigation. In-depth interviews may offer disadvantages because they sacrifice the breadth of the topic under discussion as well as the bigger picture within which the social phenomenon occurs; however, the current research overrode these limitations by using focus group interviews for breadth and documentary data for broader contexts.

Informal Interviews

Finally, informal interviews were conducted at each KCCCC, after the completion of the first round of more formal interviews. The informal interview included all teaching staff (same as the focus group interview) and lasted 35-40 minutes. These final groups and the process itself provided opportunities for the interviewees to offer more informed and additional personal views on the integration program. It also helped the researcher clarify the meaning of situations that made sense to both participants and the researcher.

Interview Process

The interviews were conducted between June 26, 2009 and June 30, 2010. The focus group interviews lasted about 60-90 minutes, and the individual interviews ranged between 45 minutes and one hour. All interviews were carried out in a suitable room at each KCCCC.
Table 3

Timetable of Interviews:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the KCCC</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| KCCCC 1          | Focus group interview June 26, 2009  
                          Individual interview June 29, 2009  
                          Individual interview June 30, 2009  
                          Informal interview June 30, 2009 |
| KCCCC 2          | Focus group interview July 2, 2009  
                          Individual interview July 6, 2009  
                          Individual interview July 7, 2009  
                          Informal interview July 7, 2009    |
| KCCCC 3          | Focus group interview January 10, 2010  
                          Individual interview January 14, 2010  
                          Individual interview January 17, 2010  
                          Informal Interview January 17, 2010 |
| KCCCC 4          | Focus group interview June 22, 2010  
                          Individual interview June 23, 2010  
                          Individual interview June 30, 2010  
                          Informal interview June 30, 2010    |

Selection of Participants

Miles and Huberman (1994) pointed out that qualitative researchers study small samples of people in depth in a specified context, and Stake (2000) noted that researchers select the cases in instrumental and collective casework. This selection of cases tends to be purposeful, rather than random, in order to select samples from which the researcher can collect information that reflects the study focus. This type of sampling was thus adopted in the current research.

Two actions based on the phenomenon under study influenced sample selection: setting boundaries and creating a frame (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Setting boundaries helped clearly define the various aspects and dynamics of the cases. Subsequently, the
researcher investigated the cases within the set time limits and through the means selected, and then linked the data collected to the proposed research questions. Creating a frame helped disclose and substantiate the basic processes or constructs that supported the study. In multiple-case sampling, for example, the conceptual framework or research questions guide the choice of cases. As a result, the researcher can decide the sampling parameters and the comparable choices for beginning fieldwork.

The study was carried out in only four schools because of time constraints. The researcher conducted focus groups and individual interviews with the participating teachers and principals at times convenient to them and deemed appropriate for the purposes of the study. The number of cases thus needed to be small and manageable.

**Teaching Staff**

At each KCCCC, a set of teaching staff (principal, special education teacher, and mainstream teacher) agreed to participate in the interviews. As a selection criterion, all teaching staff who took part in the study had at least two year’s involvement in the integration program to ensure that the information provided would be thorough, appropriate, and accurate.

**Principals.** In each integrated KCCCC, the principal participated because she was responsible for the administration of the integrated program, such as daily operations and government requests and relations.

**Special education teachers.** In each KCCCC, special education teachers participated because they were directly accountable for the front-line work of the integration program and, as such, were in an ideal position to understand what the program entailed and the requirements for the young children involved in it. If the KCCCCs operated the integration program for more than one group of young children, a
teacher trained in special education who met the selection criteria of the study also participated in the interviews.

**Mainstream teachers.** At each KCCCC, a mainstream teacher participated because she was in charge of the front-line work of the mainstream program for young children with disabilities; she was also responsible for interacting with and guiding parents. Based on these responsibilities, her experiences were essential to understanding how the young children with disabilities had progressed as a result of the program of integration.

Table 4

*Selection Criteria for Interviewees in each Integrated KCCCC*

*Total: (7 teaching staffs in each KCCCC)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of Interviewees in Each Integrated KCCCC</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>S/he had at least two years experience leading an integrated program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
<td>S/he was a trained special education teacher. S/he had at least two years experience in teaching the integrated program and conducting the IEP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream Teacher</td>
<td>4 to 5</td>
<td>S/he had at least two years experience teaching young disabled children in classrooms in an integrated KCCCC setting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Document Study

Relevant documents are rich sources of data for social research, and they enhanced this study's data collection and analysis considerably. It is common that, in case studies of this type, documentary data supplements interviews (Punch, 2005, 2014). Documents helped the researcher disclose meanings, develop understandings, and discover insights relevant to the work of the teachers in the KCCCC integration programs. The researcher reviewed different types of documents, such as curriculum guides, teaching resources, and student individualized education plans (IEPs). The goal of collecting these types of documents was to understand policy, people, and events related to the study. The documents enriched the data yielded from the interviews and assisted in the preparation of the interview questions.

Documentation

To better understand the current practice of each of the integrated programs, a myriad of KCCCC documents were examined. All the documents were collected from either principals or special education teachers directly. They included:

- government documents: e.g., letters, notices, and curriculum guides issued to the KCCCCs during the 2009-10 school year;
- school documents: e.g., meeting records, visitation records for professionals assisting the integrated programs of each KCCCC during the 2009-10 school year; and
- curricula: primarily IEPs for young disabled children.

To understand and document the benefits and challenges characterizing the integration program for young children with disabilities, the researcher collected general curriculum guides as well as IEPs for each disabled child for the 2009-10 school year from special education teachers at each KCCCC.
Data Analysis

The aim of qualitative research is to study social phenomena in a natural setting with as little disruption as possible. Because social life is complex, various analytical techniques are used to address different questions and interpret different versions of social reality (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). These techniques may be ‘interconnected, overlapping and complementary and sometimes mutually exclusive’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 9). Researchers strive to collect and analyse data from different perspectives; selection of data sources is contingent on the type of data available and the conceptual framework of the study.

A multiplicity of approaches relate to the different perspectives and purposes of analyzing research data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2003). In spite of the variety of approaches for analysing research data, a majority of approaches to qualitative analysis focus on connections made between pieces of data and segments or units of meaning called categories or themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007; Denscombe, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ong & Coady, 2006; Richards, 2005).

For the purposes of this study, the goals of transcribing and analysing data included finding common themes by reading the transcribed script several times, focusing on reoccurring and consistent ideas found within the participants’ responses. In other words, all the data collected from interviews and case studies—including documentation (such as curriculum guides, teaching resources, and student IEPs) -- were synthesized by placing the outcomes of the research into descriptive themes and sub-themes based on teaching staff knowledge as recorded by the researcher (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Boyatzis, 1998; Merriam, 1998a). Concepts derived from the relevant
literature informed all themes (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007; Boyatzis, 1998; Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998b; Yin, 2013).

The following steps, adopted in this study, aided the researcher in this technical process: (a) organizing the data; (b) summarizing the data, and (c) interpreting the data (McMillan, 2000). Wiersma’s & Jurs (2005) analogy of coding, adapted for this analysis, compared the process of coding to organizing items for a rummage sale. Prior to receiving customers, a seller compiles numerous items and then sorts and categorizes them according to their similarities, with all the items in each category placed in piles and labelled. This process of sorting, organizing, and naming categories of items reflects the process of coding and analysis adopted in this study.

Stage 1: Interview & Transcription of the Data

In this stage, the data analysis from the interviews consisted of three parts.

The first part: Topic coding. The first part entailed transcription, initially in Chinese.

Table 5

Table of Coding—Interview—Part One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question No.</th>
<th>Name (interviewees)</th>
<th>Transcript (Interview Response)</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- The first column of the table represents the order of each interview question, which facilitated memorizing the coding system.
- The second column represents the name code of the focus group interview. The interviewees were guaranteed full anonymity for the purpose of this thesis and for future publications.
- The raw data are included in the third column.
The last column lists remarks noting whether or not the transcription needed further explanation.

The second part: Topic coding. During this stage, topic coding aided data interpretation. Topic coding has been called ‘the hack work of the qualitative researcher, labelling text according to its subjects’ (Richards, 2005, p. 88). It ‘usually involves little interpretation’ (Richards, 2005, p. 92). This part involved two steps:

The first step. Line-by-line coding was the first step in the four column table. The interview questions provided topic categories, which combined to create a list of topics and sub-topics for each question. For easy reference during coding, the researcher opened a new file for each question and grouped issues by number (see Appendix C).

The second step. After capturing the topics from each question provided by the interviewees, all topics, sub-topics, and some interview responses formed a three column table in which the first column presented the topics, the second column listed the number of the interview question and the name of the participant, and the third column included selections of interview data as examples. Because the data obtained from the interviews was extensive, some interview responses as examples had coding in the thesis chapters.

The third part: Analytical coding

Analytical coding (concept mapping for emerging themes) aided further interpretation and reflection on the coded meanings (Richards, 2005). That is, the researcher revisited all interview texts and reviewed all coded topics and sub-topics through a sharp analytical lens. If necessary, she modified the coded topics and sub-topics developed in the second part. The conceptual themes developed based on the topics and coded in the second part of the data analysis, and topics and sub-topics from
different interview questions, created new themes. All the themes and sub-themes were tied to relevant existing studies (see Appendix C).

Table 6

Table of Coding—Interview—Part Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview Responses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stage 2: Case Study**

The transcription of data derived from the focus group interviews and individual interviews was transcribed in Chinese. English was used for the transcriptions of the documentation (such as government documents, school meeting records, records of professionals visiting, student individualized education plan (IEP). All of the Chinese transcripts were systematically organized in a five-column table.

To facilitate memorizing the coding system, the first column of the table represented the order of each of the following:

- The first column ‘no.’ represented different samplings of KCCCCs.
- The second column represented the documents from the KCCCC’s archives containing information related to the integration program, including but not limited to government documents, school meeting records, records of professional visits, and IEPs.
- The third column contained data transcriptions from the collected documents.
- The fourth column, topic coding, which was conducted after transcription, outlined the thought process used to interpret the data acquired from different KCCCCs.
- Remarks were included in the last column if the transcriptions or coding patterns needed further explanation.
After coding all the data obtained from the case studies, the next step was to combine the data collected throughout the different stages of the study. As noted, Stage 2 of the study focused on documents that contained information about the IEPs, the data collected from Stage 1, the focus group, and individual interviews. Therefore, the information related to the topics and sub-topics generalized from the case studies offered possible linkages to the themes and sub-themes yielded from interviews.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher implemented several procedures to increase the trustworthiness and to minimize threats to validity. First, there were two methods of data collection, including interviews and document compilation and analysis, as described above; this allowed the researcher to investigate the topic from different perspectives/data sources. Second, as mentioned earlier, allowing the interviewees to review the transcripts minimized misinterpretation of the results. In addition, the interviewer discussed the transcripts with each participant at length to verify the accuracy of the data. Third, since time is an important element in acquiring trustworthy data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), the researcher allocated sufficient time for discussion during each interview to build a sound relationship that led to the collection of sufficient and reliable information. If participants required clarification or the researcher needed further information, a follow-up interview was scheduled. In addition, data collection covered a substantial
period of time and garnered sufficient data for analysis. Fourth, throughout the analysis process, the researcher examined data extensively and verified accuracy and analysis repeatedly to enable the transferability of the findings to other similar studies and contexts.

**Ethical Concerns**

Potential participants invited to take part in this study received a description of the study, an outline of the methods used for data collection, an explanation of the worthiness of the study, and an assurance of confidentiality (a commitment to fully preserving anonymity). Additionally, the consent form clearly stated that all collected data would be used for the purposes of the research only. It was crucial to obtain informed consent from the participants at the four preschools. Only the researcher had and has access to the collected data, which has been stored securely according to ethical stipulations. Coding assured anonymity during the gathering and processing of interview notes, audio tapes, and transcripts. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time, and they were informed that their information would be destroyed if they did.

**Limitations**

One of this study’s methodological limitations is the limited number of participants (particularly teaching staff) interviewed at each of the KCCCCs carrying out the integration program. However, since the study was qualitative in nature, involving an investigation of an existing phenomenon within a real-life situation, a smaller number is acceptable. The results of this study may not be applicable to the general population; nevertheless, it provides insights on the process of integrating young disabled children into mainstream KCCCCs because even a small number of responses collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews can yield fruitful information (Check & Schutt, 2011).
Hence, the findings from this study remain significant for research in the area of KCCCC integration for young children with disabilities.

A second limitation is related to the primary language used in this study, Cantonese, a dialect of Chinese. Cantonese is the language most people use in Hong Kong. All the interviews in this study were in Cantonese, and all documents were in a written form of Chinese. Consequently, it was difficult to translate word for word from Cantonese (spoken form) or Chinese (written form) to English. Well aware of this, the researcher tried to grasp and make sense of the written documents in Chinese, or of what the participants said, and then she translated them into English. To ensure the transcriptions and clarifications corresponded to the meanings the participants intended to communicate, or to the meanings conveyed in the documents, the researcher made follow-up phone calls to school personnel and revisited some participants to clarify ambiguities. This also helped in cross-checking and confirming the transcriptions and the interpretation of the data.

A third limitation of this study had to do with the massive amount of data generated and the number of different possible existing interpretations, which could have led to an overly-subjective interpretation. An appropriate number of participants took part in this study. All participants were responsible for facilitating the integrated program in four mainstream KCCCs. Fortunately, all were open and willing to reveal their perceptions of the program and to describe in detail the role they played in its implementation. In addition, they were willing to spend valuable time on further discussions to cross-check and correct the transcripts and data analysis of the interviews in the context of the case studies.

Fourth, another significant limitation of this study is the lengthy delay between its data collection in 2009-2010 and the study’s final submission in 2017. The prolonged
ill-health of one of the researcher’s family member, which ultimately resulted in bereavement, was the major cause of the delay. This meant the researcher had to suspend enrolment in the doctoral program for several years. While this clearly ‘dates’ the research and conclusions, it can be argued that very little changed in the key policies, practices, and perceptions during the interning and data collection period.

In 2015, Hong Kong’s Social Welfare Department (SWD) launched a two-year pilot scheme on on-site pre-school rehabilitation services through the Lotteries Fund. Under the pilot scheme, non-governmental organisations offer on-site, multi-disciplinary services to participating kindergartens and KCCCs to provide early intervention to children who are on the waiting list for SWD rehabilitation services supported by public funds. The pilot scheme aims to provide professional advice for teachers to assist them in working with children with special needs and to support parents who are committed to fostering positive attitudes and developing effective skills in raising their special needs children (Social Welfare Department, 2015).

Conclusion

This study investigated a limited number of individualized cases. For practical reasons, the amount of time available for face-to-face contact with each case had limits of a maximum of two semesters with at least two visits to each site. However, the richness of the data and the range of focus groups and individual face-to-face interviews examined should provide sufficient basis to challenge and extend existing beliefs, activities, and concerns and to generate theoretical constructs related to inclusive education contexts. Multi-case analysis included in the design identified common factors from individual experiences. The factors are not generalizable to all cases and contexts, but they do provide sufficient commonalities for the development of understandings
that might well be used in the design and implementation of policy and educational practice.

These constraints will not detract from the value this study can contribute to the understanding of the perspectives and experiences of teachers and the documentation of teachers’ perceptions of integration education in the context of early childhood education in Hong Kong.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter consists of analysis of the data collected from interviews of teaching staff and principals from several mainstream KCCCCs that had integration settings for young children with and without disabilities. It draws on a range of data as described, and analyses the perceptions, attitudes, and roles and responsibilities of 28 teaching staff, including four principals, seven special education teachers, and 17 mainstream teachers. The following research questions directed the study:

1. What is the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practices?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings?
3. How do the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration education in such settings?
4. Based on the research literature and study findings, what are the recommendations for possible improvement of KCCCC integration?

Integration Program

Research Question 1 examines the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practice. The integration program provides training and care for young, mildly disabled children from 2 to 6 years old as they are learning and playing with their non-disabled peers in mainstream settings. It aims to facilitate the integration of young children with disabilities into mainstream education as well as into society (Social Welfare Department, 2001).

In the 2006-2007 school year, there were 1,015 kindergartens (including kindergarten-cum-child-care centres) in Hong Kong, with a total enrolment of 140,785 (Education Bureau, 2008c). In 2015, there were 185,400 children enrolled in 1000
kindergartens/KCCCCs (Education Bureau, 2016). This high admission rate results from parents preferring that their young children learn basic techniques and be well-equipped in preschool before entering primary school (E. Pearson & Rao, 2006).

If a childcare centre operates the kindergarten program, occasional childcare service, extended hours service, and integration service at the same time, its management structure is likely to be complex because the centre has to meet the criteria required by each of the relevant government departments simultaneously. For example, if a childcare centre has an integration setting, the centre should also operate kindergarten education. In this situation, the centre has to follow different structures to manage the different programs.


The harmonization of kindergarten and child care centres (CCCs) came into effect on September 1, 2005. By 2008, 400 CCCs had been converted to kindergarten-cum-child-care centres (Education Bureau, 2008e) and had dual registration under the Education Ordinance and the Child Care Services Ordinance. By 2007, 218 of the 400 KCCCs in Hong Kong had registered to join the integrated programs that accept both typical and exceptional children (Education Bureau 2008a; Social Welfare Department, 2008a). For children with mild disabilities, the focus was on providing training and care.

The aim of early childhood education (ECE) in Hong Kong is to provide young children with a joyful learning environment in which they can gain a balanced development of different abilities, e.g., intellectual, linguistic/language, social, physical,
emotional, and aesthetic (Education Bureau, 2008b). Normally, 95 percent of young children in Hong Kong enrol in ECE (Rao, Koong, Kwong, & Wong, 2003). The integration program aims to assist young children in joining mainstream society and having equal rights in education.

**Different Viewpoints on the Integrated Program**

Research Question 2 asks about the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings. In this study, the underlying principle of integrating young disabled children into mainstream KCCCCs directly influenced the function and concerns of all of the teaching staff and principals. Thus, 25 of 28 interviewees (15 mainstream teachers of 17, six special education teachers of seven and all four principals) reported that young disabled children, like their non-disabled peers, should be provided with equal opportunities to participate in mainstream settings and make use of facilities in society that meet their individual needs. They also noted that this would not only enhance their overall development but also benefit people around them.

Although 21 of 24 teaching staff and all four principals held positive views about young disabled children and the integrated program, there were still three teaching staff (two mainstream teachers and one special education teacher) who held some negative views. Their negative views were mainly about certain types of young disabled children, for example, those with emotional and behavioural disorders. In addition, some believed that the integrated program would affect the learning of young non-disabled children. As a result, some teaching staff thought that KCCCC integration programs could create problems for young disabled children and the people around them.

Nevertheless, all 28 participants (17 mainstream teachers, seven special education teachers and four principals) believed that integration programs could enable
young children with disabilities to integrate into a mainstream setting. They appreciated that children had the right to be educated in mainstream classrooms:

To help young disabled children integrate in mainstream programs, and let them have equal opportunities to learn with other young children. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 200)

The principles of the integrated program are to allow young disabled children to improve their weaknesses and to help them join the mainstream as soon as possible and let them have equal opportunities in education. (Principal Ms. Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

The views expressed by all 28 teaching staff suggest a belief that when young disabled children are given an opportunity to learn in a mainstream setting, they improve their development in different areas (Diamond & LeFurgy, 1994; Lai 2007).

Positive Perceptions and Attitudes

The majority, 25 of 28 interviewees (15 mainstream teachers of 17, six special education teachers of seven and all 4 principals) held a positive view about the integration of young disabled children. They believed that in order to improve a child’s all-around development, including cognitive, motor, perceptual, language communication, and social and self-care skills, special education teachers should provide tailor-made curricula for young disabled children that cater to their individual needs. They felt that young disabled children thereby gained a great deal of benefit:

Teachers follow guidance form SWD and arrange the curriculum in daily class based on the needs of young disabled children. Let young disabled children enjoy equal opportunities...Then, they can get benefits for their all-round development. (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

The integrated program setting is a suitable environment and learning atmosphere for young disabled children as there is peer interaction. Through learning and playing with peers, disabled children can have a chance to imitate
process is especially obvious in motor, language, social, and cognitive development. We provide individualized educational programs for them and invite other children to help them to strengthen their weak attention. Young disabled children will gradually succeed through interactive learning environments. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

We evaluate the child to classify the difference, weakness, ability, and actual age of young disabled children. Then we design a course to suit disabled children. We develop the curriculum following the themes and daily practices. For example, fine motor training: If the young disabled child is not skilled in cutting paper, we will emphasise that area in his or her daily class activities. (Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

All four principals, six of seven special education teachers and 15 of 17 mainstream teachers felt that young disabled children’s language development greatly improved through integration. For example:

Language communication and social skills are improved. Most young disabled children also have communication problems. Teachers and parents mentioned that the children improve in language presentation and organizational skills as they communicate with their children. (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Of the 28 members of teaching staffs, 25 had views similar to those of teachers in Hong Kong’s other integrated KCCCCs; they agreed that students studying in an integrated school setting benefitted through social development. (Crawford et al., 1999; Dowson et al., 2003). Those 25 agreed that young disabled children’s social development improved significantly after getting involved in the integrated program:

Through the integrated program, young children with... difficulties can improve their weaknesses to help them join with the mainstream group as soon as possible and develop at the same pace as young children of the same age... On the whole, every child is precious: let them have equal opportunities in education. (Principal Chiu, personal interview, January 10, 2010)
‘Let young disabled children, such as the mildly or physically disabled, enjoy equal opportunities to learn with their peer groups. Then they will not think they are so different. (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30 2009)

I think that apart from providing individual education program for young disabled children, we should also allow these children a chance to integrate. Furthermore, normal ones can also learn to integrate with the young disabled ones in a natural environment; they can have activities, lessons, games, and learning together. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

‘Assist young children in joining mainstream society and having equal rights in education. (Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Once again, 25 of the 28 teaching staff expressed the view that, when young disabled children develop friendships with their non-disabled peers, the non-disabled children feel the disabled children are no different from themselves. For example:

Although young disabled children in integrated classes may not make the first move, they will play if their non-disabled peers invite them to play. The integrated program provides them the chance to get along with others and to increase their confidence... Assist young children in joining mainstream society and having equal rights in education. (Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

These findings indicated that integration was appropriate for young disabled children because it was a morally and ethically correct form of education (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Vincent, Brown, & Getz-Sheftel, 1981). That is, young disabled children can learn different skills from communicating with others around them. Studying in an integrated setting can provide more opportunities for them to participate in various activities and learning styles (Mittler, 2012). As a result, their social, cognitive, and language skills can improve and strengthen (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2010; Frederickson et al., 2004; Jones & Frederickson, 2010).
Negative Perceptions and Attitudes

Problems in daily practice. As mentioned before, the majority of the teaching staff held positive views about the integration program. However, the remaining two mainstream teachers and one special education teacher had some negative views about certain aspects of the integration program. There were suggestions that some mainstream teachers did not have sufficient time to gain a better understanding of the problems of young disabled children. Since mainstream teachers usually needed to teach 14-15 young children in a class, they felt they could not spend extra time with the disabled. As a result, these teachers felt frustrated:

We [mainstream teachers] can’t pay too much attention to young disabled children as we have to take care of 14-15 children in the class and we are not clear about what problems they have... We let them do the same activity as their non-disabled peers in daily practices. Their schedules should not be too rigid. For example, if a young child has co-ordination problems, he may find it difficult to write. He may only be able to write simple words at first, and may feel it is hard to follow the work of non-disabled children. (Mainstream Teacher Lam, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

I know that young disabled children might affect others. A young child who always yells out and has emotional problems will affect others’ learning; or a child who always attacks his peers will be avoided. As a result of such problems in classroom management, some teachers do not like young disabled children. (Mainstream Teacher Mok, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

Unfairness to young children without disabilities. These same three teachers also thought that the integrated program adversely affected the tempo of learning in the mainstream classroom, which could be considered unfair to the children without disabilities. They noted that mainstream teachers needed to spend more time taking care of young children with disabilities, especially those with behavioural and emotional problems. As a result, they reported the integrated program was unfair to
young children without disabilities. For instance, ‘It is unfair to young non-disabled children. When the teacher needs to spend more time with young disabled children, it takes away a learning opportunity for the whole class’ (Mainstream Teacher Cheng, personal interview, June 23, 2010).

Previous research had found that teachers were afraid that young disabled children would not have the special attention they needed and that the students would not be treated equitably (Koster, Pijl, Nakken, & Van Houten, 2010; Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996).

A burden to KCCCC and teaching staff

Despite generally positive views on integration, a majority (two of four principals, five of seven special education teachers, and 17 of 21 mainstream teachers) experienced concerns about including children with severe disabilities. They agreed that young children with a mild handicap were acceptable in mainstream classrooms, but those with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) or those who were mentally retarded (MR) were less acceptable or even unacceptable. Young children with EBD were more easily out of control and irregularly attacked or hurt their peers in mainstream classrooms. These difficulties placed extra pressure on teachers, especially for the mainstream teachers. Consequently, they tended to object to children with EBD and MR studying in mainstream KCCCCs. One respondent said,

Those suffering from mental handicaps have limitations; they are usually not up to the standard of the mainstream curricula and can’t always catch up with the class activities. The mainstream teachers feel exhausted and frustrated. (Principal Wong personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Recently, an autistic child with severe problems was admitted in my class. She was 3 years old. Generally, she has no problem on gross and fine motor skills but her emotional level and communication skills are low. The other 14 children in
my class are also 3-year-olds. It’s difficult for me to manage while she has emotional problems. (Mainstream Teacher Ng, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

It would appear that most teaching staff in Hong Kong’s integrated KCCCCs had the same concerns as teachers in Hong Kong’s integrated primary and secondary schools. They welcomed students with a mild grade handicap, acceptable behaviour, and good academic attainment because they were easier to handle in the classroom and met the teaching objectives of the mainstream curricula (Chong et al., 2007; Crawford et al., 1999; D. K. P. Wong, 2002; D. K. P. Wong, Pearson, & Lo, 2004; Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, Karasu, Demir, & Akalin, 2013; Yuen & Westwood, 2001).

**The Human and Physical Support and its Effect on the Functional Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers in Integration KCCCCs**

Research Question 3 probed how the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integrated education in these settings. In this study, the availability of human support (e.g., teacher training, professional help, and public education) and physical support (e.g., teaching material and resources, guidelines, and instructions) were shown to influence the functional roles and responsibilities of teaching in integrated settings.

**Human Support: Teacher Training in Early Childhood Special Education**

With the exception of the seven special education teachers, the other four principals and 17 mainstream teachers in this study lacked the relevant certificate and related skills in early childhood special education (ECSE). Hence, they had limited professional knowledge and skills relevant to handling and teaching young disabled children. This compromised the quality of the program:

Sometimes mainstream and special education teachers may not know how to manage and design a proper curriculum for young disabled children as they don’t
have adequate professional knowledge. (Mainstream Teacher Lai, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

I believed that mainstream teachers would also feel anxious. This semester the young children accepted by us are mostly autistic and so at the start of semester many of them have emotional problems, such as running around and shouting... Teachers need to spend a lot of time to deal with this. Teachers need to use more time for classroom management and teaching. (Mainstream Teacher Lee, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Insufficient external support, such as training courses, workshops, and seminars on ECSE for teachers, were available every year. Due to limited resources, only in-service special education teachers and teachers who had potential as special education teachers were admitted into the courses. Others, like mainstream teachers and principals, were not the priority for consideration. All of the principals, four of seven special education teachers, and 13 of 17 mainstream teachers argued that it was difficult for teachers to deal with young disabled children with insufficient training.

For teachers’ training, it seems that only special education teachers can apply. It is difficult for mainstream teachers, even principals, to apply. (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Currently, the 1-year training course is only provided for the special education teachers. In fact, one year of basic on-the-job training is not enough for us to learn different teaching strategies for many aspects. Even the special education teachers may not learn many of the ways of dealing with young children’s behavioural problems. Especially the new special education teachers may lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of the reasons for the behaviour of young disabled children. (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Four principals and seven special education teachers suggested that the special education teachers should attend re-training courses in ECSE every few years to update and refresh their knowledge:

Teacher training is not enough, SWD should provide more resources for KCCCCs. Currently we can get information from organizations such as Heep Hong Society
and The Spastics Association of Hong Kong. Early childhood education has kept changing; however, we have inadequate teacher training. SWD needs to provide updated information every few years. This can help us adopt the latest information and can refresh our knowledge and strategies for teaching young disabled children. (Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 14, 2010)

We only have the chance to attend the short-term courses managed by the different organizations. The topics are diverse and may not suit our needs. I hope to be given more opportunity for study and systematic training about special education in the future. (Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Responses from the special education teachers indicated that they should have an opportunity to refresh themselves in how to work with others and handle the diverse needs of the disabled in mainstream KCCCCs with integrated programs. They could do this through re-training programs on ECSE in order to enhance their teaching strategies and knowledge about designing IEPs (Schmidt, 2000).

In this study, 17 mainstream teachers had attended just one module on ECSE while they were studying for the higher diploma. ‘Yet, the mainstream teachers in integrated preschool spend a considerable amount of time taking care of and educating young disabled children’ (Principal Wong). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, all mainstream teachers in this study said that they felt frustrated when facing young disabled children in mainstream classrooms:

The difficulty is that we [mainstream teachers] receive just a basic knowledge about special education, yet we need to handle young children with severe problems. Once I also saw a young disabled child bite his peer and then laugh after biting. That was really unfair to the children... The teachers didn’t know how to solve the problem! (Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

The difficulty comes from the KCCCCs as they admit some children with severe disabilities who give us [in my class] many problems with classroom
management... because we do not have any training in special education. Maybe even the special education teachers who have already received professional training feel frustrated. (Mainstream Teacher Ku, personal interview, July 6, 2009)

Under these circumstances, four principals, 17 mainstream teachers and seven special education teachers suggested that training in ECSE should be available for mainstream teachers in integrated KCCCCs:

The government should allocate more resources to teacher training, not only for special education teachers, but also for mainstream teachers to systematically study special education. Then they can learn the basic skills and be able to solve disabled children’s behaviour problems. (Special Education Teacher Kwok, January 17, 2010)

Perhaps mainstream teaching staff at integrated KCCCCs did not have to undertake training in ECSE. For instance, the four principals had attended just one module on ECSE with 30 to 70 contact hours. Because of insufficient training, some principals did not understand many matters related to the integrated program:

The main concern ...is my principal lacks processional training about special education. She may not truly understand the integrated program and young disabled children, so I need to explain and talk more with the principal. (Special Education Teacher Yuen, July 7, 2009)

In order to acquire the basic skills and necessary knowledge to support young disabled children, all principals, all special education teachers, and 15 of 19 mainstream teachers in this study recommended that all teaching staff in integrated preschools receive ECSE training. Some of them expressed their views, for example,

I think it is necessary for all teachers in integrated KCCCCs to have training in special education, then they can get a better understanding and acceptance of young disabled children. (Principal Cheng, personal interview, January 14, 2010)

Actually, the government should provide more resources for special education teacher training. Teachers who have basic skills are more confident in teaching
young children with special needs, and children can get appropriate support. (Special Education Teacher Chan, personal interview, June 29, 2010)

These results were similar to those of Dowson et al. (2003), D. K. P. Wong et al. (2004), V. Pearson, Lo, Chui, and Wong (2003), Poon-McBrayer (2004), and Yuen and Westwood (2001). Those researchers found that it was important for teachers in Hong Kong’s integrated primary and secondary schools to receive training in integration in order to promote the quality of the integrated program.

Various early childhood researchers have claimed that all teaching staff, including principals, special education teachers, and mainstream teachers in integrated KCCCCs, should have the chance to receive professional training in ECSE. This would prepare them with the knowledge and skills necessary to face the challenge of meeting young disabled children on a daily basis (Cook et al., 2007; McCooneky & Bhlierigri, 2003; U. Sharma & Nuttal, 2016). In addition, training in ECSE could help teaching staff know how to work together with professionals and parents to facilitate the learning and development of young disabled children (Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005). Therefore, sufficient teacher training plays an important role and makes a significant contribution to an effective integrated program in mainstream KCCCCs (Diamond et al., 1994; Lai, 2006; McCooneky & Bhlierigri, 2003).

Professional Help: Allied Health Services Provided by the Government

Professionals have the opportunity to communicate with parents and give them suggestions about helping their children at home:

Parents think that KCCCC seminars with invited psychologist and language therapists are useful in helping them cope with their children’. (Special Education Teacher Kwok, January 17, 2010)

In addition, all 28 participants (four principals, seven special education teachers and 17 mainstream teachers that they had to make a request well in advance if they
needed help from psychologists. For immediate problems, the integrated KCCCCs needed to seek advice through telephone conferencing. Teaching staff suggested that the clinical psychologists should come to visit each of the integrated KCCCCs on a more frequent and regular basis:

The clinical psychologist has not visited for a year. He used to come every half year. He used to come when there was a special request by parents... I hope that the clinical psychologist can visit our school at least once a year, and discuss problems with the parents of young disabled children. (Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

The clinical psychologist could visit more often. Now, he seems to come to the KCCCC once a year. It would be better if he could come once in 6 months, as there are many changes and uncertainty in children with special needs even in 6 months. If the clinical psychologist could make more regular visits, the follow-up and monitoring for disabled children will be better. (Mainstream Teacher Ku, personal interview, July 6, 2009)

Aside from voicing their points of view on the frequency of visits by the clinical psychologists, two of four principals, five of seven special education teachers, and 12 of 17 mainstream teachers of young disabled children wondered whether the very infrequent visits made by the physiotherapists and occupational therapists really benefited the young disabled children. The physiotherapists and occupational therapists only visited the integrated KCCCCs every 3 to 4 months, and met the young disabled children for only 10 to 30 minutes. As one principal pointed out:

Professional support is provided by SWD but the frequency and the actual time spent in the KCCCC is very limited. It is even worse for the physiotherapists and occupational therapists. They only visit the school once every 3 to 4 months and the training session is short. Only suggestions are made for training the young disabled children. I doubt whether special education teachers could follow up with the training appropriately. (Principal Wu, personal interview, June 22, 2010)
Seven special education teachers stated that the treatment offered by the speech therapists was better than before; four principals and 12 of 17 mainstream teachers reported that the visits made by the speech therapists were more regular than those of the physiotherapists and occupational therapists. Hence, they urged that the speech therapy sessions for each child should increase even more because they could provide more quality help for young disabled children with language problems. For instance:

Special education teachers do not receive training in speech therapy. I really hope that the speech therapist can increase his visiting time so that the young children who have language problems can improve. Currently, KCCCCs tend to have more children with language problems. If the speech therapist visits every 2 weeks (as we have two integrated groups) then the special education teachers can adjust their learning plan after they receive suggestions from the speech therapist. (Principal Chiu, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

Five of 17 mainstream teachers stated that communication between professionals and teaching staff was inadequate and that it could affect the quality of the programs provided to young disabled children:

Lately, the speech therapist visits the KCCCC more often than before. I think this helps the young children improve. The special education teachers’ follow-up work on the children’s conditions is much better. In addition, we seldom communicate with the occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and psychologists, which is the main concern about young disabled children’s learning. (Mainstream Teacher Yau, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

Four principals, seven special education teachers and 12 of 17 mainstream teachers agreed that the government did provide professional help. However, they believed that if the therapists and psychologists would visit the integrated programs more regularly and increase their visiting hours, it would enhance the quality of the integrated programs (Dowson et al., 2003; D. K. P. Wong et al., 2004).

To implement effectiveness in KCCCCs with integrated programs, human resources should be adequate and appropriate (Odom & McEvoy, 1990; Poon-McBrayer,
2004; Poon-McBrayer & Wong, 2013). Furthermore, if more specialist help were available, the mainstream preschools might be more willing to integrate young disabled children into their settings (Lai, 2004).

Numerous articles suggested that a trans-disciplinary approach would provide the best quality services for young disabled children and their families (Hanson & Lynch, 1989; Lai, 2007; Linder, 1990; U. Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012; T. M. Smith & Duncan, 2004; Wolfendale, 2000). This approach would involve professionals, such as psychologists and therapists, and teachers and parents working collaboratively in teams to design and implement appropriate programs for each disabled child and his or her family (Craig, 1997; Galant & Hanline, 1993; Schmidt, 2000).

**Physical Support**

**Admission policy.** A decrease in the birth rate in Hong Kong over the past few years lessened the demand for places in the integrated program (Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2005). The SWD continually invited more mainstream KCCCCs to provide the integrated program (Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2005); however, they also required integrated KCCCCs to admit more than six young disabled children into a group without providing more resources. These circumstances created a great deal of pressure for the teaching staff in integrated KCCCCs. As stated by one principal:

Currently, it takes quite a long time for the disabled to be admitted. The SWD requires integrated KCCCCs to admit more than usual, such as seven to eight young disabled children into a group, or even to operate two groups. This creates much pressure on my colleagues. (Principal Wu, personal interview, June 22, 2010)

However, the latest official review of the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Program Plan made by the government in 2005 showed that the average wait time for the integrated program was about four months (Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2005). Despite this,
three of four principals, seven special education teachers, and 17 mainstream teachers pointed out that the allocation and distribution of young disabled children to integrated KCCCs was not even. The wait time for enrolment varied and depended on the district that contained the integrated KCCC. If there were a sufficient number of KCCCs in a district, young disabled children could get a placement quickly, but some young children in certain areas waited for more than 3 months for a placement -- some waited over 6 months or even a year. As a result, some of the parents of young disabled children had to send their children to study in other districts.

The location of the KCCC is the major issue affecting the admission of the student numbers. For example, in some districts you have to wait for more than half a year for admission. (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

Such long waiting periods could delay young disabled children's learning progress and development: More places for the integrated program KCCCs are needed to avoid waiting times. During the long waiting times, parents of young disabled children feel helpless and disappointed. The government should provide more opportunities for young disabled children to learn in mainstream KCCCs. (Mainstream Teacher Ng, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

The findings in this study showed respondents thought that young disabled children, once identified, should receive an appropriate program in an appropriate district and environment. This would enhance the young children's potential and allow them to benefit from the program (Kid Source, 2005). In addition, this would help family members feel relaxed in managing their children's daily learning (Kid Source, 2005). In view of this, sufficient places for admission on a timely basis are indeed important for successful KCCC integration.

**Funding policy.**  According to the teaching staff (four principals, seven special education teachers, and 17 mainstream teachers), the SWD allocates approximately HKD 5000 each year for each group in an integrated KCCC to arrange activities (e.g.,
outings and parent-child activities) for young disabled children and their parents. That funding could be used only to organize activities such as outdoor activities with young disabled children and their parents. Consequently, all the integrated KCCCs that participated in this study said they needed some of the money to purchase teaching and learning materials. As one principal noted:

We usually spend the money buying some teaching materials in order to replace the old ones and update the teaching resources. We also arrange some activities for parents, like a buffet, and invite old students’ parents to share the experiences of their children, who are now studying in primary schools. (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Despite allotted funding every year, three of four principals, four of seven special education teachers and 17 mainstream teachers stated that, since the funding provided by SWD was minimal, it affected the quality of activities for the young disabled children and their parents in integrated groups:

When we arrange activities for families of young disabled children, we also hope that more family members could attend as this can develop communication between school and parents and enhance the family unit. However, the funding was limited. This really affects the quality of the activities. (Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010)

In addition, they stressed that the funding for integrated KCCCs was often insufficient for purchasing teaching aids, physical development auxiliaries, and computer teaching packages specially designed for young disabled children. There were also not enough funds to conduct seminars and activities to enhance parents’ knowledge about their disabled children. Hence, they urged the government to allot more money to the integrated KCCCs and to allow such funding to be used to purchase teaching and learning materials. For instance:

I use the funding for arranging activities. I invited parents to assist in the activity. If the activity was out of budget, I will buy teaching and learning materials for the program on my own. So the SWD should allot more money to each of the
integrated groups. (Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010)

If there was more money from the government, we could buy more teaching and learning materials such as perceptual-motor equipment. The SWD should not only allow us [the integrated groups] to use the money to arrange activities, but also agree to us making use of the money to purchase teaching materials that can enhance children’s learning. (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

In contrast, one principal and three special education teachers considered the funding allotted by the government adequate. As Principal Ms. Chiu stated,

I think the money provided by SWD is OK because we only spend it on organizing the activities for the (disabled) children and their family members’. (Principal Chiu, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

Three of seven special education teachers stated they shared the teaching resources procured using the integrated funding with non-disabled children in mainstream classes:

We always purchase resources for all young children in the KCCCC. We have only bought books and some teaching materials... We also use money from the integrated program for providing whole school activities. Because the Integrated program advocates that all children participate in mainstream classrooms, we use this money to purchase learning and teaching materials appropriate for implementing and facilitating the integrated curriculum in mainstream classrooms. (Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010)

These findings replicated Bricker (1978), who encouraged using adequate resources in integrated settings to help both disabled and non-disabled children. However, to maximize the benefits for all young children from using resources in integrated settings, teachers should allocate resources for young disabled children and their peers very carefully (Green & Stoneman, 1989).

Besides purchasing resources, two of four principals, seven special education teachers and 15 mainstream teachers also urged the SWD to allot more funding to the
integrated KCCCCs so they could reduce the class teacher’s workload by employing more teachers or assistants. This was especially true when the young disabled children had behavioural and emotional problems during the lessons; additional staff could enable teachers to spend more time taking care of the young disabled children:

I needed to finish the documentation work before the therapy sessions would be conducted... If the government allots more money to employ teaching assistants to help young disabled children this can help reduce the load of implementing the integrated program. Then the teachers can teach. (Special Education Teacher Chan, personal interview, June 29, 2010)

Additionally, to provide an adequate and comfortable environment for all young children, including the young disabled children, two of four principals and two of 17 mainstream teachers suggested that the government should provide more funding to the integrated KCCCCs to reconstruct the environment and purchase furniture:

This KCCCC environment and its furniture are old and unfit for class activities... The government should allot us [the integrated KCCCC] more money to reconstruct the KCCCC environment and purchase new furniture. This would help provide a suitable and stimulating environment for the young children to play and learn in daily. (Mainstream Teacher Mok, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

Several studies indicated that funding was a major issue associated with including young disabled children in integrated learning environments and one of the important elements in enhancing the education of young children (McWilliam et al., 2001; O’Brien, 2001; Odom & Bailey, 2001; Odom et al., 2011; Sandall & Schwartz, 2002). Numerous studies suggested that sufficient funding could be an important component for promoting an effective integration program in mainstream KCCCCs (Esposito & Peach, 1983; Frederickson et al., 2004; Lai, 2006; O’Brien, 2001; Vaughn et al., 1996). Adequate resources and productive environments could stimulate the young disabled children’s
learning and also enhance teaching (Gottwald & Pardy, 1997; Hegarty, Pocklington, & Lucas, 1981).

Implementation Guidelines

The four KCCCs in this study used the SWD guidebook, *An Operational Guide to Childcare Centres Operating an Integrated Programme for Young Children with Disabilities* (2001), which was much better than earlier versions. It clearly stated the procedures for enrolment and referral, which was easier for the KCCCCs to follow:

There is not enough guidance for teaching strategies or for curriculum planning. Generally speaking, there are some documents sent to the KCCCCs on psychological therapies, on occupational therapy, and on physiological therapy. In addition, there is less from the Social Welfare Department, especially the curriculum guidebook. (Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010)

Four principals, seven special education teachers and 17 mainstream teachers indicated that they received no advice on how to implement the integrated program apart from the SWD’s guidebook. Consequently, different integrated KCCCCs implemented the integrated program in different ways:

To make alliance with different KCCCCS, it would be better if the government issued a handbook outlining the responsibilities and roles of special education teachers and mainstream teachers, and effective ways of educating and taking care of young disabled children. For example, preparing teaching materials based on collaborative decisions. (Special Education Teacher Leung, personal interview, June 23, 2010)

The training program (IEP) needs to be tailor-made to meet their weaknesses in order to foster the children’s skills and learning progress. Young disabled children are weak in certain areas; they may have advantages in other areas. For example, a young child who is a slow learner may have good motor skills. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

Special education teachers usually designed the IEPs. However, the special education teachers included input from the mainstream teachers whom they met with,
once a week, to consider daily or weekly goals. These teachers worked very closely together to implement the program.

Study findings supported the view that both special education teachers and mainstream teachers perceived the importance of shared responsibility when they collaborated. The interview data were positively related to three special education teachers’ perceptions that they shared equal responsibility for participation and collaborated with the mainstream teachers.

**Promotion of Harmony among People in Society**

Four principals, seven special education teachers and 17 mainstream teachers pointed out that many of the young disabled children studying in the integrated program were not academically weak. The teaching staff noted a good chance for these young children with mild disabilities to learn and play with their peers in mainstream settings. They felt that young disabled children should have more chances to interact in order to grasp different skills, especially social skills in working with people who did not have disabilities. For instance,

Parents let them study at KCCCCs with an integrated setting, help them to lead a normal life, and to learn and play with young children of a similar age; they can get fully involved. (Mainstream Teacher Lai, Personal interview, July 6, 2009)

We need to let young disabled children have more chances for exposure, interaction, and working with normal children in order to improve their weaknesses. Then they can learn and play together more acceptably. (Mainstream Teacher Wu, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

The integrated program was beneficial to young disabled children because it could provide a path for them to make sense of the real world through exposure to a variety of persons and experiences (Bennett et al., 1998; Guralnick, 1994; Katz & Mirenda, 2002; Turnbull & Winton, 1983; Wolery & Wilbers, 1994). Accordingly, young
disabled children could become part of their communities and be accepted (Galant & Hanline, 1993; Lai, 2007; T. E. Smith et al., 2015; Turnbull & Winton, 1983).

Seven special education teachers stressed that their integrated program provided natural opportunities for young non-disabled children to acquire civic education. Through the program, young disabled children had different opportunities to interact and communicate with other children. Conversely, working with young disabled children in class can provide a deeper understanding of disabled children for the children without disabilities. For example

I think in general... childhood is a good time for young children to learn and accept children with those special needs, in order to be willing to help young disabled children. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

During the lessons, non-disabled children notice that young disabled children are slower to carry out tasks; they will think of ways of helping them (Special Education Teacher Leung, personal interview, June 30, 2010)

Previous studies also found that people in mainstream settings showed a positive attitude toward integration for the disabled because every young child should have an equal opportunity for an education in a mainstream classroom through daily activities (D’Alonzo, Giordano, & VanLeeuwen, 1997; V. Pearson et al., 1998).

**Promoting Public Education**

The Hong Kong government is responsible for informing the public of the plight of disabled school-aged children and their integration into mainstream educational settings. As noted by one observer:

Recently, there are promotional clips shown on TV. More people in society know about disabilities. Utilize the broadcast to highlight the equality issue for the children with disabilities’. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)
Three of four principals, five of seven special education teachers, and 15 of 17 mainstream teachers expressed a belief that, if the public had a greater understanding of young disabled children, then teachers and parents in mainstream schools might be more accepting of these young children. As one teacher observed:

Currently, there are still many Hong Kong people who are not willing to accept young disabled children. For example, in the streets, and on public transportation it can be seen that some people with disabilities are discriminated against... The government should provide more public education, and educate society to accept disabled people. (Mainstream teacher Chan, personal interview, June 23, 2010)

Lack of knowledge about young children with disabilities creates discrimination and rejection (H. Y. Cheung & Hui, 2007; Deisinger, 2000). Hence, one of four principals, two of seven special education teachers, and two of 17 mainstream teachers noted that the government should promote more public education to educate citizens so they would accept disabled people. If people in society could understand that most young disabled children were no different from others, it could enhance public education. For instance:

The government should do its best to promote and explain to all people in society the purpose of the integrated program at KCCCCs. Government should let people know more about the integration program... As sectors of early childhood education are merged, all pre-primary settings, not only KCCCCs, should offer the integrated program. (Principal Wu, personal interview, June 22, 2010)

These findings suggested the importance of promoting public awareness about the value of young disabled children and KCCCC integration. These strategies could clarify people’s misunderstandings and enhance people’s acceptance of integration for the disabled (Lai, 2006). As a result, people might adopt more positive attitudes for integrated programs at KCCCCs (Gottwald & Pardy, 1997).
Conclusion

The analysis presented here shows that teaching staff with young non-disabled children held mixed views about the integration of young children with disabilities in KCCCCs. Teachers believed that integration in a mainstream setting could provide chances for young disabled children to interact with non-disabled children, the opportunity to learn early in life to accept people with different abilities, and to live harmoniously.

Consequently, integrated programs in mainstream classrooms could enrich young disabled children’s potential and provide benefits for their peers and people around them. On the other hand, some unfavourable opinions of the program emerged; some mainstream and even special education teachers held some negative attitudes about the KCCCCs’ integration of young disabled children. Their attitudes and views were certainly influenced by the nature and severity of the disability. For example, many could not accept young children with emotional and behavioural difficulties or mental retardation. Teachers also mentioned that the operation of the integrated program for young disabled children would prove to be a burden on the teaching staff, and thus deprive non-disabled children of learning opportunities. Consequently, they were not willing to accept the integration of young severely disabled children into mainstream KCCCCs, even though they supported the principle of integration on the grounds of equity.

Finally, some teachers expressed concern that young disabled children could not obtain appropriate help due to insufficient teacher assistance, which would cause frustration in integrated classrooms, and then a consequent worsening of behaviour. Accordingly, the inadequate policy and lack of teaching staff who had experience with
the daily difficulties and barriers to implementation caused them to have negative responses to integration in practice.

Because there was a gap between government policy and the actual practice of KCCCC integration, teaching staff and parents often had mixed feelings about KCCC integration and young disabled children. The gap comprised structural, instructional, and cultural barriers, as well as human and physical resources. Furthermore, these barriers also hindered the young disabled children and the people around them from benefiting from integrated settings.

Accordingly, it seems that in order to remove the structural, instructional, and cultural barriers and provide the best integrated program for young disabled children in Hong Kong mainstream preschools, the following issues should be of high concern:

- Sufficient and adequate teacher training and staff development courses in early childhood special education to all teaching staff (e.g., principals, special education and mainstream teachers);
- Sufficient professional support and collaboration among professionals, teaching staff, and parents;
- Adequate places for young disabled children;
- Sufficient funding for purchasing adequate and appropriate teaching and learning materials, reconstructing the physical environment, and employing adequately trained teaching staff;
- Clear and detailed instructions for the implementation of KCCCCC integration;
- Clear instruction guidance and support from the government to integrated KCCCCs; and
- Promotion of public education about disabilities and integration.
Chapter 5: Case Study KCCCC (1)

This chapter and the one that follows present case studies that focus on two KCCCCs. The organization and presentation of the individual case studies are in the same general format. They draw on a range of data to describe and analyse the integrated program at each centre. The data consists of documents related to both integrated and individualized education programs and interviews with the teaching staff. Key themes relating to provisions made for the young disabled children are as follows:

- the preschool environment and facilities, teaching resources, staff numbers, and professional training;
- perception and accounts of the principal and mainstream and special education teachers; and
- the contrast between government policy and actual practice.

The KCCCC (1) Facility and Environment

The Facility

Established in the 1980s and located in a public housing estate in the middle of the New Territories in Hong Kong, KCCCC (1) was a non-profit that provided education and care with full-day sessions for young children from 2 to 6 years old. The services at KCCCC (1) included kindergarten education, occasional childcare service, and integrated service, regulated and subsidized by the SWD. In addition, in order to meet the needs of families and working parents who needed longer hours of child care assistance, the kindergarten-cum-child-care centre ran extended hours without any subsidies from the SWD. KCCCC (1) belonged to a religious association that provided various services, such as childcare services, youth and community services, elderly services, school education, and continuing education for people in Hong Kong.
Environment

The main entrance of KCCCC (1) was the gross motor activity room, which housed equipment for gross motor development, such as a slide and a trampoline. There were themed decorations in order to facilitate children's learning. The second part of the activity room was for music lessons and had a piano; there were some attractive illustrations of musical materials in the music area.

On the right side of a corridor was the administrative office. This office was shared by the principal, teachers, and the administrative officers. On the left side of the corridor was the kitchen and storage room; to the left of the storage room was the counselling room where the special education teacher implemented programs with young disabled children. The counselling room was tidy, but it was small and packed with boxes of teaching materials. Because of the limited space, the room did not provide a comfortable and safe learning atmosphere for young children, especially for those with disabilities.

The corridor leading away from the entrance was in four sections, divided by another activity room used for gross motor skills and the music activity for the N3 and N4 classes. The other three classrooms were in an open setting divided by cabinets. The N1, N2, and N3 classrooms shared the same area, with cabinet dividers separating the rooms by the gates. Inside the N1/N2 classroom, cabinets were at the sides. Because the classrooms at KCCCC (1) were in an open setting separated by cabinets and gates, young children, especially disabled children with hearing impairments, were easily distracted by the noise or the activities happening in the other classes:

Our centre is an open area and not a good choice for children who have hearing problems. Previously, there was one young child who suffered from hearing impairment. After making a visit to our KCCCC, his parents understood that the environment of our KCCCC might not be suitable for his child and he finally gave
up his place here. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

The washroom for KCCCC (1) was located at the end of the corridor. Boys and girls had to share one washroom. In total, there were six sitting toilets for the girls and a separate urinal for the boys. The washroom was bright and clean and the floor was dry. The air flow was excellent in the washroom. The washroom setting was simple, without any decoration.

**The Staff at KCCCC (1)**

The staff at KCCCC (1) comprised one principal, six teachers, one clerk, and two janitors. All of them were full-time staff and seven had teaching qualifications (including the principal). In addition to these 10 full-time staff members, KCCCC (1) also had four part-time staff members including one janitor and three office assistants. All of the staff members at KCCCC (1) were female.

All of the teaching staff at KCCCC (1) were qualified kindergarten teachers (QKT) who had met the basic requirements for preschool education in Hong Kong. The teacher responsible for implementing the integrated program at this KCCCC had achieved additional training and was qualified as a special education teacher. The staff’s teaching experience ranged from 5 to 19 years, with two having more than 10 years’ experience and four having less.

**The Principal at KCCCC (1)**

The principal Au, was 42 years old. After completing secondary school, she taught preschool until the date of the case study and had over 19 years experience. She had almost completed a bachelor’s degree in education, specializing in ECE, but she had spent only 30 hours studying early childhood special education (ECSE). In other words,
she had invested time in upgrading her skills in ECE but not in ECSE. Thus, her professional knowledge and skills for handling young disabled children was very limited.

Au remarked that the integrated program offered in a KCCCC provided opportunities for young disabled children to interact with their non-disabled peers, empowering them to adapt to daily life and integrate into society more easily (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009). In addition, she thought that the integrated program in KCCCCs could help non-disabled children understand how to help people who were different from themselves. Au said the integrated program was popular with the parents of young disabled children because it could provide appropriate help for their children.

Although Au held positive attitudes towards the integrated program for young children with disabilities, she would not enrol children with mental retardation or children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This was because she believed that the teaching staff would need more time to take care of these ‘problem children’, so it would be unfair to non-disabled children.

**The Special Education Teacher at KCCCC (1)**

The special education teacher, Ms. Ho, was 39. She had an F.5 (high school) qualification and originally trained as a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT). Her later training was as a special education teacher. She had a total of 19 years experience teaching young children in preschools, of which 8 years were in the integrated program for young disabled children. However, she stated that she and the other special education teachers should undergo re-training in early childhood special education (ECSE) every 5 years to update and refresh their knowledge about working with young disabled children.
Like Principal Au, Ho believed that the integrated program could empower young children with disabilities to integrate into mainstream settings and thus provide them with opportunities to learn how to communicate and perform daily skills in mainstream KCCCCs. In her view, the integrated preschools provided IEPs, the tailor-made curricula for young disabled children, and catered to their individual needs. As she stated in the interview:

We can focus on the weaknesses of young disabled children, and provide training based on the children’s ability. And we can adjust the progress after the observation and evaluated with therapists. Young disabled children learn through observing and imitating normal children. They cannot have the chance to learn, and cannot benefit much, if they stay in special schools. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009; KCCCC (1) IEP Document (4), 2009)

She went on to say: Usually, KCCCCs can promote social harmony via the school activities because, through the integrated program, people, including the non-disabled children and their parents, can learn to accept that young children with disabilities have different abilities but are essentially the same as they are. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

Although Ho held positive views towards the integrated program for young disabled children, she also had some negative views. She thought that some children, such as those with emotional and behavioural difficulties or mental retardation, could place a serious burden on the school and teaching staff.

The Mainstream Teachers at KCCCC (1)

Mainstream teacher Ms. Quah was a 29 year old female. After completing secondary school, she taught at a KCCCC. She trained as a Qualified Kindergarten Teacher (QKT) and had 8 years experience teaching preschool children.

It is not always easy to manage a mixed class, one with young children both with and without disabilities. Mainstream teachers must have professional training in early childhood education to handle young children competently in integrated settings. At the
time of this study, professional training in early childhood special education (ECSE) was not available for mainstream teachers in the Hong Kong KCCCCs that operated the integrated programs. Thus, Quah did not have any professional training in ECSE, despite needing it.

In fact, KCCCC (1) did not have enough funding to provide any related teacher training or workshops for mainstream teachers before running the integrated program:

Because of the financial problems, we are unable to provide any training for the teachers. For the benefits to all children we prefer to hire a janitor to provide assistance. This must be cheaper though. (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

Principal Au thought that it was too expensive to employ an additional teacher to take care of young disabled children.

I prefer to hire a janitor to provide assistance to look after the young disabled children. This is much cheaper than hiring an additional teacher and sometimes they will help teachers look after the other children in class if they go out for a visit. (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

There is no doubt that a janitor’s services would prove useful at the KCCCC; however, it seemed unlikely that a janitor’s services would provide the specialized assistance needed for young children with disabilities.

Quah found it difficult to manage the young disabled children in a mainstream classroom because she did not have any training in ECSE. She considered young disabled children, especially those who had mental retardation or emotional and behavioural difficulties, to be a burden to the KCCCC and teaching staff. She also believed that the integrated program had ruined the reputation of the KCCCC and affected the enrolment rate. In addition, she thought that the integrated program would result in negative feelings among the young disabled children because they did not have enough ability to achieve the learning goals of the mainstream curriculum. Despite her negative attitudes
towards the integrated program, Quah acknowledged that the integrated program could help the young disabled children integrate into mainstream settings.

Quah suggested that all mainstream teachers in integrated KCCCCs should have training in ECSE:

If mainstream teachers have training in special education before teaching the mainstream class with young disabled children, we can identify the problems and have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of disabled children. They can also collaborate better with the special education teacher. (Mainstream Teacher Quah, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

Ho agreed that mainstream teachers in the integrated program should receive special training in ECSE. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

The results above were similar to the findings reported by Avramidis and Norwich (2002), that teaching staff in mainstream settings held mixed views about the integrated program. They held positive attitudes because they supported the principles of equality of opportunity and social integration. On the other hand, they tended to hold negative attitudes towards preschool integration because of insufficient support from the government, such as teacher training, funding, and resources. They were also reluctant to accept inclusion of young disabled children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties or mental retardation.

Numerous studies documented the need to provide professional training in ECSE for all staff teaching in integrated KCCCCs, as well as refresher courses for special education teachers (Cook et al., 2007; Cross et al., 2004; Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002; T. E. Smith et al., 2015). These researchers argued that, through undergoing training or courses in ECSE, the teaching staff would gain the knowledge, teaching strategies, curriculum planning ability, and skills they needed to provide a quality integrated program for young disabled children, thus meeting their needs.
The Young Children at KCCCC (1)

In the 2008-2009 school year, KCCCC (1) admitted approximately 85 young children. All of them were living in the west side of the New Territories in Hong Kong. The young children were divided into four groups. Group N1 served those aged between 2 and 3, Group N2 served those between ages 3 and 4, Group N3 served those between ages 4 and 5, and Group N4 served those between ages 5 and 6.

In the 2008-2009 school year, six young disabled children enrolled in the integrated program. These six young children spread out amongst the four groups in the KCCCC: two in N1, one in N2, one in N3, and two in N4.

Current Practices in the Integrated Program at KCCCC (1)

In 2008-2009 the over-enrolment of two extra children with disabilities at KCCCC (1) created a burden for special education teachers planning the IEPs for each child. The IEP for each disabled child needs to meet his or her individual development needs. Appropriate planning such as this can benefit both children with disabilities and those without disabilities. Another main problem at that time was that the mainstream teacher didn’t have sufficient communication and collaboration with the special education teacher.

Integration Practices Provided by the Government

At KCCCC (1), the Education Bureau managed the mainstream program related services, whereas the SWD controlled the integrated program.

Admission for a Young Child with a Disability

The SWD maintained a list of young disabled children for whom they arranged admission into the available integrated program places. The waiting time for young disabled children to enrol in the integrated program ranged from 6 months to a year (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009). However, since the birth rate in Hong
Kong declined during the years prior to this study (Census and Statistics Department, 2007), the SWD actively invited KCCCCs to take part in offering the integrated program in order to reduce the waiting times (Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, 2005).

Due to the long waiting time for admitting young disabled children into the integrated programs, the SWD pressured the integrated KCCCCs to take more young disabled children without providing more resources. Officially, one integrated group should consist of only six young disabled children (Social Welfare Department, 2001). However, KCCCC (1) had to take two more young disabled children into its program, raising its total to eight. Despite this, the SWD increased neither the school’s support nor its subsidy (KCCCC (1) Document (1), 2009).

Study results showed that the SWD had still not sufficiently prioritized the developmental needs of young disabled children because there was still a waiting list to get into the integrated program. This could delay children’s development because of the long waiting time (Lai, 2007). In view of this, the principal at KCCCC (1) urged that the integrated program expand to all Hong Kong KCCCCs so the extra responsibility could be shared more widely.

In Hong Kong, the KCCCC with an integrated program should be offered in every pre-primary education setting... Every child has an equal right to learn and play. Education should be open for all young children regardless of whether they are smart or have special needs. (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

**External Support for the Integrated Program**

According to Special Education Teacher Ho:

The SWD provides funds for KCCCC (1) to employ the special education teacher, who has the responsibility for training and taking care of young disabled children in the integrated program. My salary and provident fund was paid by the SWD. Since the school only has the one special education teacher, who is required to design and implement the individualised educational programs (IEPs) for all eight young disabled children, the daily IEP session for each young disabled child is
very short. For example, each session lasts only 20 to 30 minutes (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009).

The SWD required the special education teachers in integrated KCCCCs to provide one-on-one training and a small group activity for each disabled child (Social Welfare Department, 2001) to help her or him fit into the mainstream classrooms and get along well with the non-disabled students (Social Welfare Department, 2001). Ho could only provide one-on-one IEPs for each disabled child three days per week. During these, she was offering small group activities, in-class training, observation, and shaping writing posture:

Small group activities are beneficial to young children with different abilities. They can stimulate each other, because some children can’t adapt to their whole classes easily. It is easier for young children to get involved in group activities. I also provide in-class training... for the young disabled children to adapt their lives in mainstream classrooms, because they usually find it more difficult and it takes more time for them to get used to the environment than normal children... during lessons, watching them write, and do homework. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

Ho could not always fulfil the responsibilities of daily IEP because she often had to take extra duties such as being required to substitute for a mainstream teacher and look after her class, or take up administrative work or even cooking duties.

Unfortunately, the SWD did not provide adequate guidance to teaching staff on how to improve the teaching and administration of integrated programs for young disabled children in KCCCCs.

The inspector comes to school and counts the number of young disabled children studying in the integrated program. However, the inspector does not give detailed feedback. (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

This is because SWD’s criteria of service quality for the integrated program in KCCCC that the SWD did not check conscientiously, under these circumstances, KCCCC
(1) had set up its own policy with respect to the training program for a disabled child (SWD HKSAR, 2001; Special Education Teacher Ho, informal interview, June 30, 2009).

According to the SWD, integrated programs were responsible for designing the curriculum and IEPs in different developmental domains for children with disabilities. In order to maintain the quality of the integrated program, there was a need to provide external support for the integrated program through frequent and careful supervision of the integrated preschools, thus providing valuable suggestions to the teaching staff for program improvement (K. N. Cole, Mills, Dale, & Jenkins, 1991; Cook et al., 2007; Lai, 2006, 2007). In addition, a program evaluation would further examine the effectiveness and the impact of the program on a young disabled child and his or her family (Cook et al., 2007; Diamond et al., 1994; Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002; T. M. Smith & Duncan, 2004). A previous study suggested the need for clear and detailed information in order to help the teaching staff easily implement the integrated program and provide a quality program to young disabled children, (Lai, 2006).

**Professional Help: Allied Health Services Provided by the Government**

The professional support provided for implementing the integrated program also had limitations. For instance, in the 2008-2009 school year, the occupational therapist visited only four times, while the physiotherapist made only three visits. Each visit lasted approximately half an hour with each disabled child. Also, since the occupational therapist had other business, she did not have time to meet all young disabled children in her care (KCCCC (1) Document (3), 2009)

In our KCCCC, we have eight young [disabled] children [studying in the integrated program], but one of them is not required to have occupational therapy. So, a total of eight young [disabled] children have undergone the therapy. However, she [the occupational therapist] only has time to meet five young children in one morning, because she does not have time in the afternoon. But she will come
again in mid-July to follow the young children whom she cannot meet today. (Special Education Teacher Ho, informal interview, June 29, 2009; Document (1) SWD, 2008).

Even though the occupational therapist returned a few weeks later, the progress of these two young children might have suffered delays because of the long waiting time from early March 2008 to mid-June 2009 (KCCCC (1) Document (2), 2009). Additionally, the therapists needed equipment to measure the motor skills of young disabled children, but sometimes the necessary equipment was unavailable. When that happened, the therapists could not provide accurate information about the disabled children’s progress. The occupational therapist and physiotherapist were expected to give advice to the special education teacher and parents of young disabled children, while the special education teacher and the parents of young disabled children were to train the disabled children accordingly. However, the therapists needed sufficient time and appropriate equipment to be effective. Data collected from KCCCC (1) clearly indicated that the young disabled children could not fully benefit from the therapy sessions offered by the occupational therapist and physiotherapist because of insufficient meeting time and equipment.

On the other hand, KCCCC (1) was able to get much more adequate support from the speech therapist who visited more regularly. In the 2008-2009 school year, the speech therapist made 23 visits. Normally, each of the therapy sessions lasted 20 minutes, but sometimes the urgent cases lasted longer, which meant that the other children’s meetings might be reduced to 15 minutes. (Special Education Teacher Ho, informal interview, June 30, 2009; KCCCC (1) Document (3), 2009). In order to provide more stimulation to young disabled children in terms of talking to and interacting with their peers, the speech therapist asked two young disabled children to form a group to learn together during each therapy session.
Parents of the young disabled children could join the speech therapy session to learn how to aid their children at home with easy-to-follow training (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009).

The teaching staff and colleagues at KCCCC (1) noted that, to properly help the disabled children, the professionals needed to allocate more time to each visit:

The speech therapist comes to visit the young disabled children regularly, usually twice per month. The other therapists have not made a visit to the KCCCC for a very long time. I think the visit times are insufficient. Thus, I believe that they can come around more regularly, such as once per week. This will benefit and make it easier to follow the progress of the children with disabilities. (Mainstream Teacher Quah, informal interview, June 30, 2009)

**Transition**

There was no well-developed government policy to guide and give instruction to parents on how to choose a primary school for their young children with disabilities when negotiating the transition from preschool.

The government only provides assessment of young disabled children before they start to choose a primary school. The medical social worker at the Child Assessment Centre begins to telephone the parent of each of the young disabled children when the child is studying in N3 or is around 4 years, 6 months, of age. This call is to enquire and collect some information about the progress of their child, such as his or her child’s learning and development. After that, parents just have limited guidance and have no particular chance to consult unless they have specific questions. (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)

Many scholars, as well as teachers, suggested that government and integrated KCCCCs could do more to assist young disabled children and their parents in making the move from integrated KCCCCs to primary schools (Atwater, Orth-Lopes, Elliott, Carta, & Schwartz, 1994; Cook et al., 2007; Kirk et al., 2006; Lai, 2006; Wolery & Wilbers, 1994).
Conclusion

The findings from KCCCC (1) indicated that, because of the underlying principles of the integrated program, integrating young disabled children was a positive and beneficial experience for the children in their daily practice. However, the data also showed that the teaching staff at KCCCC (1) had limited success in promoting the integrated program for young disabled children. These limitations were due to psycho-medical, social, and organizational barriers. For example, the environment at KCCCC (1) was not really adequate for the needs of young disabled children.

This case study noted a gap and barriers between the governmental policy and actual daily practice in the provision of preschool integration; this situation impeded the progress and focus of the disabled children. This gap involved both human resources (e.g., teacher training in early childhood special education, public education, professional help, and family support) and physical resources (e.g., instructions for program implementation, admission into school openings, funding and resources, transition to primary schools from integrated KCCCCs, and external support for the integrated program).

Additionally, the findings implied a need to ensure that all young children, including the disabled, would develop while in the program. Also, there was a need to monitor the environment, as well as the progress of young disabled children, to ensure that each young disabled child participating in the integrated program would have appropriate and adequate stimulation. Support for parents for at-home training of young disabled children would be useful as well.
Chapter 6: Case Study KCCCC (2)

This chapter explores the daily experience with the integrated program at KCCCC (2). The chapter outlines the implementation of the integrated program at governmental and KCCCC levels and offers the views of teaching staff, who serve as significant influences on the development and learning of disabled children.

As was shown with KCCCC (1) in Chapter 5, there was a gap between government policy and actual provision of the integrated program. The mainstream KCCCC operating the integrated program utilized this service to enhance the learning and development of the disabled children.

The KCCCC (2) Facility and Environment

Facility

KCCCC (2) began in 2005 in a private housing area on the west side of Kowloon in Hong Kong. KCCCC (2) served as a non-profit organization, providing full-day education for young children from 2 to 6 years old. The services at KCCCC (2) included occasional childcare services, integrated services, and extended hours service. The Education Bureau managed and subsidized kindergarten education, while the SWD regulated and subsidized the occasional childcare services, integrated services, and extended hours service.

The KCCCC (2) website mentioned that it offered the integrated program. The special education teacher pointed out during her interview that KCCCC (2) informed the parents of non-disabled children about the operation of the integrated program (Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009). This indicated that KCCCC (2) emphasized the integrated program in its publicity. Studies have shown that this kind of positive public education can help promote an effective integrated program for young disabled children in mainstream settings (Gottwald & Pardy, 1997; Lai, 2006; Lai & Gill,
KCCCC (2) belonged to a charity association that provided various services for the community, such as preschool to secondary school education, social services, and medical services. In 2006, KCCCC (2) developed guidelines for the special education teachers to operate the integrated program (KCCCC (2) Document (2), 2009). KCCCC (2) was the only integrated kindergarten-cum-child-care centre in its association.

The association previously funded our centre to purchase toys and storybooks for young disabled children studying in the integrated program and provided physiotherapy consultations for parents of young disabled children. (Principal Wong personal interview, July 7, 2009)

There needs to be full support in terms of providing funding, staff training, and professional help in order to promote an effective preschool integration for young disabled children and their parents.

**Environment**

The KCCCC (2) environment was designed for young children both with and without disabilities, allowing all young children to play and learn in a safe environment. The safety of young children was the first priority, although the space was quite small. For example, the corridor and the classrooms had soft plastic pads.

The entrance also served as a multi-purpose concourse, used for gross motor activity and a napping area. This area was also used for special activities, such as birthday parties. Because of the lack of space, Principal Wong found it difficult to arrange activities for the young children.

Two classes combined during the physical play session; consequently, it was difficult for children to stretch and move around in this small area. On the opposite side of the multi-purpose room was Classroom 1, with Classroom 2 next door. These two rooms connected to form one large room shared by N1 and N2. Classroom 2
accommodated 43 young children (20 from N1 and 23 from N2). With so many young children in the classroom at the same time, the classroom was very noisy.

The decorations for Classroom 2 were very basic. The young children’s books were outdated and did not match the topics being taught. There were few toys, only Legos, blocks, and toy cars. Young children, including the disabled children that were assigned to Classroom 2, did not have adequate materials for learning.

Classroom 3 was next to Classroom 2, and was larger. Every morning before lunch time, mainstream teacher Lee and her assistant brought their groups to learn in this room.

The kitchen was opposite Classroom 3. Next to the kitchen was a washroom for young children. The washroom setting was simple but its decoration was beautiful. The washroom was clean, the floor was dry, and the light was bright. However, boys and girls had to share because it was the only washroom in the entire school.

Next to the young children’s washroom was the counselling room. This room was quite small. Since the preschool had two integrated groups, there were two small tables situated in the room so each group could hold special programs for young disabled children. In addition, many materials, such as paper boxes, toy baskets, big balls, and dolls, were in the room, which made it very crowded. Nevertheless, special education teacher Cheung thought that it was quite adequate for her and her young disabled children:

The counselling room was small, and it’s not enough to form small group activities for young disabled children. Due to the limited space, two classes share use of the room. Sometimes the noise from one group affects the other. It would be better if there was only one class in the room. (Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009)
Alston and Kilam (2004) recommended that schools should provide appropriate and separate areas for counselling and learning for each disabled child, so they can concentrate on their learning while having individual training. Equally problematic, the general office was next to the counselling room, so it also stored many teaching and learning materials. The lockers and cabinets were next to the general office and were another source of potential disturbance.

In summary, the KCCCC (2) environment was typical of KCCCCs in Hong Kong. It was small, and frequently there was insufficient access to storage areas. Under these conditions, KCCCC (2) could not purchase sufficient resources for training young disabled children (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009). Odom and Bailey (2001) warned that inadequate resources could affect the development and education of young children in integrated settings. Most scholars and researchers encourage KCCCCs to arrange their physical environment carefully to maximize the learning of young children with different needs (Alston & Kilam 2004; Cook et al, 2007; Frederickson et al., 2004; Wolery, 1994a).

The Staff at KCCCC (2)

The full-time staff at KCCCC (2) consisted of one principal, 11 teachers, one clerk, and four janitors, including one cook and three cleaners. In addition to these 16 full-time staff members, KCCCC (2) also had two part-time teaching staff members and a janitor who was also an assistant cook. All of the staff members at KCCCC (2) were female.

All teaching staff members at KCCCC (2) were qualified kindergarten teachers (QKT) who had achieved the basic qualification and requirements for preschool education in Hong Kong. KCCCC (2) operated two integrated groups, with two special education teachers receiving additional training and qualifications. These two teachers were mainly responsible for implementing the integrated program. At KCCCC (2), a
majority of the teaching staff was in their early 30s to late 40s. However, none of the rest of them had qualifications in special education. Their teaching experience ranged from 10 to 20 years, with three having 8 to 10 years experience and nine having more.

**The Principal at KCCCC (2)**

Principal Wong of KCCCC (2) was 39 years old. After completing secondary school, she taught preschool until the date of the case study. Although very busy with her teaching job, she was committed to continuously taking courses in early childhood education (ECE) and received the professional training certificate as a kindergarten teacher (CE-KG). At the time of the study, she was in a program for a bachelor’s degree in education, specializing in ECE. She had 15 years experience teaching preschool children; however, she had only attended classes in the basic course on early childhood special education (ECSE) for a total of 30 hours. She was aware of the limited nature of her professional knowledge:

> I only completed 30 hours of basic knowledge in special education... Honestly, it is not enough for me, and it’s difficult for me to give advice to my teachers about the integrated program. We have gone by trial and error. Education requires experience. For those concerns I applied for entry to a one-year part-time program on special education a few years ago, but was unsuccessful, because they give priority to the ones who teach it. (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

To maintain and improve the quality of the integrated program in mainstream settings, principals at integrated KCCCCs need to receive professional training in ECSE. Numerous articles have documented that principals play an important role in managing the KCCCCs, influencing the school dynamics, designing the school curriculum, monitoring teachers’ attitudes, developing a positive school climate towards young children with disabilities, and promoting effective special education services (Anderson & Decker, 1993; McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004; Sage & Burrello, 1994).
Principal Wong believed that an integrated program operating in a mainstream KCCCC could benefit both young children with disabilities and their peers, and thereby help society be more harmonious. In addition, she thought that parents of young disabled children would feel relaxed because their children could be in the integrated setting and receive help from parents of non-disabled children.

I did not admit young children with emotional and behavioural difficulties because I thought they would provide too much pressure and difficulties for the teachers. I only admitted young children with mild disabilities into the integration program. (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

The Special Education Teacher at KCCCC (2)

Special education teacher Cheung was one of the two special education teachers at KCCCC (2) and was 37 years old. She had an F.5 (high school) qualification and was trained as a childcare worker. After gaining basic teacher training, she also trained as a special education teacher. She had 15 years experience in teaching preschool children, of which 12 years was in the integrated program for young disabled children. However, she thought that her professional training in early childhood special education (ECSE) was superficial and not enough because she received only 1 year of in-service training on ECSE. Hence, she felt that her professional knowledge of ECSE was insufficient and could not imagine having young children with severe disabilities integrated into the mainstream setting.

Cheung remarked that young disabled children could obtain benefits and improve their weaknesses through integration, and that they could follow the same curriculum as the non-disabled children. For example, if a disabled child needs to improve her or his fine motor skills to achieve the learning objectives for IEP, then her or his activities need to be adjusted in order to match the theme in the classroom. In addition, she thought that the integrated program could provide benefits to the parents
of young disabled children because they could receive professional help and follow up support from the KCCCC about how to train their young children at home (Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009; KCCCC (2) IEP Document (4), 2009).

**The Mainstream Teacher at KCCCC (2)**

Mainstream teacher Lee was 35 years old. After completing secondary school, she had taught at KCCCC (2) up until the date of this case study. She completed the professional training certificate in the kindergarten teacher course (CE-KG) and had 6 years experience in teaching young children in preschools.

She did not have ECSE qualifications. She felt that she did not have sufficient knowledge and skills to educate and take care of young disabled children in mainstream classrooms. She noted that the mainstream teachers in integrated KCCCCs needed to receive training in ECSE if they were to benefit all children.

With regard to the KCCCC integration, mainstream teacher Lee said the integrated program could benefit young disabled children because the special education teachers could provide tailor-made curricula and IEPs to cater to their individual needs. Besides this, through learning and playing in the mainstream classrooms, the social and language development of the young disabled children would improve. She also felt that parents of young disabled children could benefit from KCCCC integration because they could learn from the other parents how to teach and utilize the training at home, as suggested by professional therapists.

However, like Principal Wong, Lee did not want to integrate young children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) into the mainstream classrooms. She had previous negative experiences dealing with young children with EBD who had taken a great deal of staff time. In addition, some parents of young children with EBD always
complained to her and her colleagues because they thought their children were not receiving sufficient help.

Other studies, as well as this one, have shown that the feelings of teachers towards integrating children with disabilities were conflicted (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Odom & Bailey, 2001). On one hand, they had a positive attitude towards KCCCC integration because they believed that it could benefit young disabled children and the people around them. On the other hand, they had negative attitudes because of insufficient support from the government in areas such as teacher training, the extra time needed to take care of young children with severe disabilities, and clear guidelines for teaching strategies. Numerous scholars have argued the necessity of a professional course in early childhood special education (ECSE) for all principals and mainstream teachers in integrated KCCCCs, with re-training courses in ECSE provided for special education teachers (Cook et al., 2007; Cross et al.; Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002; Lai, 2006; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; McCoonkey & Bhilirgri, 2003; Toth, 2012).

The Young Children at KCCCC (2)

In the 2008-2009 school year, KCCCC (2) admitted approximately 107 children. Almost all of them lived in the north side of the New Territories in Hong Kong. The young children were divided into four classes: Nursery 1 (N1), Nursery 2 (N2), Nursery 3 (N3), and Nursery 4 (N4). Normally, N1 served young children who were between the ages of 2 and 3; N2 served those between 3 and 4; N3 served those between 4 and 5; and N4 served those between 5 and 6.

In the 2008-2009 school year, the classes added 12 young children with disabilities: four in N1, three in N2, two in N3, and three in N4. Special education teacher Cheung looked after six young disabled children.
Integration Practices Provided by the Government

At KCCCC (2), the Education Bureau supervised the mainstream program and its related services, whereas the SWD supervised the integrated program.

Admission for a Young Child with Disability

At KCCCC (2), the waiting time for young disabled children to enrol in the integrated program ranged from six months to a year, which was similar to KCCCC (1). As mainstream teacher Lee stated in her interview:

Young disabled children need to wait a long time because the government has limited places. Sometimes the queuing up may take up to one year. Children need to wait at least half to one year after the young disabled child has graduated from the integrated preschool KCCCCC before a school place is available in the integrated program.

In order to get the appropriate training as soon as possible, one of my students’ parents only waited around two weeks before being admitted into the integrated program. Because her parents selected an integrated KCCCCC located out of their living area they had to make a long journey to the KCCC (i.e. 30 minutes for taking the bus and 10 minutes for walking to our KCCCCC): they had to leave home early every day. (Mainstream Teacher Lee, personal interview, July 8, 2009)

Just as with KCCCCC (1), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) also required KCCCCC (2) to take one extra disabled child into the program. Thus, special education teacher Cheung had seven young disabled children in her group. Despite this, KCCCCC (2) did not receive any extra support from the SWD for taking this child. Principal Wong declared, ‘many integrated KCCCCC are also required to admit more kids into a group without receiving any extra support. This may overload the special education teachers and also the KCCCCC’s’ (personal interview, July 7 2009).

These findings clearly reflected the local context and situations that faced local KCCCCCs. That is, places in the integrated programs for young disabled children were insufficient to adequately supply the services. In addition, the long waiting times for
admission and acquisition of suitable training could affect the development of young disabled children (Lai, 2006, 2007). If young disabled children’s parents wanted their children to obtain a place quickly, they often had to enrol them in a school outside of their living area, necessitating much time invested in travelling to and from school every day.

**Professional Support Provided by Government**

The professional support provided for the implementation and home training for the parents of young disabled children KCCCC (2) also had limitations. For instance, in the 2008-2009 school year, the psychologist paid only one visit to KCCCC (2) to work with a disabled child who had had emotional and behavioural difficulties (KCCCC (2) Document (3), 2009). After this visit, the psychologist did not make another visit to KCCCC (2). Similarly, in the 2008-2009 school year, the occupational therapist visited KCCCC (2) only four times (KCCCC (2) Document (3), 2009), and the physiotherapist made only three visits (KCCCC (2) Document (3), 2009). In interviews, both Principal Wong and special education teacher Cheung indicated that the actual time the occupational therapist and physiotherapist spent at the KCCCC was very limited and insufficient. Furthermore, the occupational therapist and physiotherapist spent only one day (from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., including the lunch hour) to assess and assist 13 of the young disabled children.

According to Cheung, the occupational therapist and physiotherapist generally came only to observe the young disabled children and then make some recommendations for the special education teachers to train them or to request the young disabled children’s parents train their children at home by following the methods provided by the special education teachers. She advised that the special education
teacher continue to train the child at school. (Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Clearly, such visits and support were superficial and inadequate. The occupational therapist and physiotherapist merely came, assessed the young disabled children, and made recommendations to the special education teachers about training them. Since the special education teachers were experts in neither occupational therapy nor physiotherapy, Principal Wong doubted their competence to provide quality training programs for the young children with disabilities (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009).

By contrast, KCCCC (2) had considerably more assistance from the speech therapist, who visited KCCCC (2) at least two times a month. The parents of the disabled children attended every speech therapy session because they needed to train their children at home using those methods (KCCCC (2) Document (3), 2009).

Despite this greater frequency and inclusiveness, each speech therapy session was fairly short, usually lasting about 20-25 minutes, and the special education teachers then had to train the disabled children using the suggestions made by the speech therapist. Principal Wong was doubtful about whether they had the competence to train young children with language problems (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009). According to Wong and Cheung, this teaching was largely ineffective because the therapists and special education teachers at KCCCC (2) worked independently and did not collaborate. By contrast, the literature suggested that a trans-disciplinary mode was the best strategy for providing quality service to young disabled children and their parents, (Cook et al., 2007; Lai, 2007; Pretzel & Hiemenz, 2004; T. M. Smith & Duncan, 2004). This meant that external professional services, including different therapists (e.g., psychologists, speech therapists, social workers, and teachers), and parents of young
disabled children should meet regularly and work cooperatively to gain the information they needed to design and provide the best services for young disabled children and their families. Also, cooperation could help provide a good quality integrated program for young disabled children in a mainstream setting (Cross et al., 2004; Lai, 2007; Odom & McEvoy, 1990).

**Conclusion**

The findings from KCCCC (2) indicated that, although the teachers felt they lacked the experience and knowledge to implement the integrated program, they recognized that KCCCC integration was a good practice for teaching young children with disabilities. They noted that KCCCC integration could benefit young disabled children and the people around them. Because of this, they strove to implement the integrated program, including providing some support for the parents of young disabled children.

The case study revealed a gap between governmental policy and actual practice in the provision of the integrated program at this mainstream KCCCC. This gap included funding and resources, teacher training in early childhood special education, professional support, places for admission, public education, instructions for the implementation of the program, and parental support. Additionally, in order to ensure that each disabled child received appropriate learning and care in integrated settings, there was a need to monitor the environment of the integrated KCCCCs closely.

In conclusion, this research study explored the essential issues of the integration program at Hong Kong KCCCCs. The research collected from interviews and the literature review showed that teachers’ perceptions and practices were fundamental issues in the education of children with and without disabilities.
**Comparison of Case Studies**

The findings from KCCCC (1) and KCCCC (2) showed similar challenges and difficulties. The biggest challenge was that teachers had limited training, professional knowledge, and skills for handling young disabled children and meeting the needs of every child. Furthermore, the environment and space was inadequate and unsuitable for educating children with disabilities. KCCCC (1) had an open area design that was not suitable for children with hearing problems. KCCCC (2) lacked space, which made it very difficult to arrange activities for handling small group activities for young disabled children. Both KCCCs’ principals indicated that the actual time that the occupational therapist and physiotherapist spent at the KCCCC was very limited and insufficient. Nor were government policy and implementation guidelines clear or sufficient. KCCCC (1) and KCCCC (2) sought greater transparency to help teachers manage the integrated program with young disabled children. Having effective strategies could prove invaluable for both teachers and students.
Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

This study outlined external factors and government policies that affected KCCCCs’ ability to effectively implement the integrated program in Hong Kong. Difficulties with the integration policies and school practices arise from the gap produced by the shortage of human and physical support. These issues can be categorized into the psycho-medical, social and organizational models. This chapter offers recommendations for improving government policy and school practices, and then makes suggestions for future research.

Aims of the Study

The broad purposes of this study were to explore the current policy and practices of the integrated program in Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs for young disabled children and to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and concerns of teaching staff.

The investigation was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practices?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings?
3. How do the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration education in such settings?
4. Based on the research literature and study findings, what are the recommendations for possible improvement of KCCCC integration?

Research Question 1  What is the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practices?  Integrated programs operating in mainstream settings have been advocated by many scholars because of the underlying principles concerning basic human rights, equal opportunity,
social justice, equity, and non-discrimination. Thus Srivastava et al. (2015) declared ‘The right of children with special needs to attend a regular school has its genesis in many international statements, such as the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006)’. Hong Kong’ integration policies were mainly influenced by the 1978 Warnock Report and the United Kingdom’s Education Act of 1981. An integration policy began to be developed by the Hong Kong government in the late 1970s. That integration policy was implemented gradually by including special education in mainstream settings at the pre-to-secondary level. It included students with mild mental handicaps, moderate physical handicaps, and sensory impairments (Education Department, 1997; Social Welfare Department, 2001). Research studies from around the world illustrated that young disabled children can obtain more stimulation to learn and play through participating in a real world environment—like the mainstream KCCCCs—with peers who have no disabilities than they could if they were in a segregated environment (Bailey, McWilliam, Buysse & Wesley, 1998; Bennett et al., 1998; Buysse & Bailey, 1993; Cross et al., 2004; Forlin & Loreman, 2014; Guralnick, 1994; Katz & Mirenda, 2002; Swick & Hooks, 2005).

Research Question 2  What are the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings? In this study, the majority of teaching staff agreed with the principle of integrated education, accepting that every child is unique and has a right to learn. However, as reflected in other studies (Shah, Das, Desai, & Tiwari, 2016), the daily practice of integration in mainstream classes affected their perceptions and attitudes. They were constrained by insufficient funding and resources as well as by limited teaching training and professional help. Hence, the absence of efficient teaching strategies and skills were key issues that affected teachers’ perceptions and attitudes.
about children with disabilities. This study confirms other research that teachers’ support for integrating disabled children in mainstream classrooms can facilitate the development of motor skills, social and emotional skills, language and communication skills, and cognitive abilities and can strengthen and improve different skills through a tailor-made curriculum in integrated programs (Bennett et al., 1998; Buysse & Bailey, 1993; Hauser-Cram et al., 1993; Killoran et al., 2007; McConkey & Bhlarigri, 2003; Mesibov & Shea, 1996; Mittler, 2012; Oremland, Flynn, & Kieff, 2002; Peck, Odom, & Bricker, 1993).

Research Question 3 How do the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration education in such settings? This study confirms that the special education teachers need to tailor the IEP for each disabled child. It also confirmed that suitable environmental settings, such as individual teaching and small group activities, can facilitate the different needs of these children. Furthermore, the mainstream teachers must adjust the curriculum for daily activities to the different needs of both disabled and non-disabled children. They need to participate in activities appropriate to their particular needs in order to assist the learning progress of both groups of children in the class.

In addition, studies have also documented that KCCCC integration not only benefits disabled children but also their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, teachers need to know all of their children, recognize their special characteristics, and encourage social behaviour with non-disabled peers. They must support the children as they experience different activities in the classroom while also being able to help them achieve the developmental level appropriate for each child and use teaching strategies that facilitate the children’s learning. (Sucuoğlu, Bakkaloğlu, Karasu, Demir, & Akalın, 2013). Hence, to ensure that young disabled children can play and learn in a quality environment, the
daily classroom practices of integrated KCCCCs must cater to the diverse needs of young children with disabilities.

Research Question 4  Based on the research literature and study findings, what are the recommendations for possible improvement of KCCCC integration? From the literature review and the findings from this study, some recommendations for enhancing government policy and school practices can be made. The government needs to increase funding of the integrated program, especially to enable better classrooms and space, the purchase of adequate teaching and learning materials and relevant activities, and to improve the quality of professional help.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to increase ECSE teacher training in order to enhance the disabled children’s learning. This would allow more expert instruction and also greater autonomy for KCCCCs to adjust the curriculum (including IEPs) to match individual needs.

There is a need for clear government guidelines to help disabled children and parents with a smooth transition to primary school, a key destination for integration education. Finally, there is a crucial need to better educate the new generation and the public about the principles of integration education and how it benefits all people.

The Study Design

The approach taken in this study was qualitative, with data collection undertaken in two stages.

Stage 1: Interview

In Stage 1, 28 teaching staff (four principals, seven special education teachers, and 17 mainstream teachers) from four Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs with an integrated program participated in semi-structured interviews aimed at understanding their perceptions and attitudes; practices, roles, and responsibilities; and the possible
benefits of the integrated program in mainstream KCCCCs for young disabled children and their peers.

Stage 2: Case Studies

The aim of Stage 2 was to conduct case studies to learn about the teachers, students, and activities that were part of the daily life of the integrated KCCCCs. These case studies explored the ways in which government policy helped or hindered them. Two of the four Stage 1 Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs with an integrated program that participated in the semi-structured interviews were selected to take part in case studies. The case studies examined documentation (e.g., government and non-government circulars and letters regarding the integrated program, meeting records, and the individualized educational plans for disabled children in the integrated program) and included additional informal interviews with teaching staff. Through the interviews, the researcher explored the staff members’ perspectives and beliefs about the benefits and weaknesses of the integrated program for young disabled children and the people around them, such as their parents, non-disabled peers, and those students’ parents.

Using data derived from multiple sources, including interviews with the teaching staff and documentation, strengthened the trustworthiness of this study. The approach yielded rich information and filled a gap in the local knowledge about the integration of young children with disabilities at the pre-primary level.

Summary of the Key Findings of the Study

The findings showed that all teaching staff believed in the principle that KCCCCs with an integration program could provide important benefits for both young disabled children (e.g., enhancing their overall development) and their non-disabled peers (e.g., becoming more understanding towards people who need help). In addition, most teaching staff in the four Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs with an integrated program
believed integration provided equity for young disabled children and promoted harmony in the broader society. All participants perceived that the integrated program operating in these KCCCCs was not as effective as it could be. Consequently, it appeared that the young children with disabilities and the people around them did not benefit to the greatest extent possible. Discussion of the key features contributing to this negative perspective about the implementation of integration programs follows below.

**Professional Help**

The external professionals were unable to provide adequate support to young children with disabilities in the integrated KCCCCs. For example, the psychologists did not visit the KCCCCs regularly and the occupational therapist and physiotherapist only came to visit each young disabled child three or four times each year.

In addition, because each visit had limited time, the therapists normally provided recommendations to the special education teachers on how to train the young disabled children at school and also asked the teachers to convey those suggestions to the disabled children’s parents so they could train their children at home. Communication and cooperation between the professionals and teaching staff was very weak. Together, these findings made it clear that the young disabled children and their parents were not obtaining the best service from the professionals.

**The Gap between Government Policy and School Practice**

The findings exposed a gap between government policy and school practice, a gap that involved both human and physical support. As mentioned by the teaching staff, the integrated program needed additional human support, such as teacher training, professional help, and public education, as well as physical support, such as admissions, funding and resources, and transition planning.
Insufficient Teacher Training

None of the principals and mainstream teachers in this study had specific training in early childhood special education (ECSE). As a result, they were not properly or professionally prepared for educating and taking care of young children with disabilities in mainstream environments. Apart from the one-year basic on-the-job training in ECSE, most had not even received refresher courses from their organizations. As a result, they lacked competence in collaborating with other people (e.g., occupational therapists, psychologists, and special education teachers) about the needs of children with disabilities.

Lack of Public Education

The integrated program needed positive publicity. Although the integrated program for young disabled children began in the late 1970s, many people were still unaware of its existence and purpose. This suggests that the government had not provided enough public education about young children with disabilities and the integrated program. As a result, many people still viewed young children with disabilities and integrated programs negatively. There is a stigma associated with disability, even in young children, that causes parents to feel shame. In this environment, the future of preschool integration is at risk, along with the development of young children with disabilities.

Insufficient Physical Support

Because of the shortage of places for young disabled children, the integrated KCCCCs often had to admit more disabled children into the integrated groups, without any additional funding and resources. Increasing the number of young disabled children placed pressure on the teaching staff because of the heavy workload. As a result, the
young disabled children and their parents did not receive the best possible services from the integrated KCCCs.

Inadequate Instructions and Guidelines for Daily Implementation

Except for offering the integrated KCCCs a curriculum guidebook on the integrated program, the government didn’t regularly update the KCCCs about the integrated program. Furthermore, the latest version of the guidebook at that time (2009) was superficial; the special education and mainstream teachers did not find it very useful. As a result, the effectiveness and quality of the implementation of the integrated program were compromised, as were the education and development of the young disabled children.

Insufficient Funding and Resources

The study found that funding was not sufficient for the KCCCs to acquire many of the teaching materials and books that were specifically designed for young children with disabilities. The integrated KCCCs also did not have enough funding to employ extra staff who could help take care of the young children with disabilities and thereby reduce the workload of the mainstream and special education teachers. The minimal annual funding also meant that the integrated KCCCs did not have adequate funds to organize certain activities or invite all family members of young children with disabilities to join the activities. This negatively affected the perceptions of the staff and, consequently, the quality of the learning environment, the implementation of the curriculum, and the involvement of the young disabled children’s family members.

Inadequate Transition to Primary Schools

Although assessment provided by the Child Assessment Centre was only at an early stage of development, that information still was used to make decisions about whether young disabled children should attend a special or mainstream primary school.
There was actually no clear policy to help parents choose a primary school for their disabled child at the time of this study. This situation made the parents of young disabled children feel unsure and unfairly treated because their children’s very important next move was based on only one assessment. All of this made the disabled children and their parents feel helpless during the transition stage.

**Recommendations for Government Policy and School Practice**

This study argues that negative perceptions by staff about inefficiencies and inadequate government policy contributed to shortcomings in the implementation of the integrated program in Hong Kong mainstream KCCCCs. With a view to more effective implementation of the integrated program, the following suggestions are outlined:

**Increasing Development Funding**

Adequate financial resources are a main issue for the implementation of all quality policies (Elmore, 1987; Lai & Wong, 2007; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005). Appropriate funding and resources would promote more effective integrated KCCCCs (Buysse et al., 1999; G. Llewellyn et al., 2002; Onaga, & Martoccio, 2008). Hence, the Hong Kong government should increase the resources allocated to the development of integrated KCCCCs.

The findings in this study strongly suggested that the annual funding for each integrated group of a mainstream KCCCC should be increased to permit the purchase of better teaching and learning materials. More funding could help each integrated KCCCC obtain more appropriate, updated, and adequate teaching and learning resources (e.g., toys, books and training equipment) to meet the needs of young children with disabilities, stimulate their learning, and enhance their development (Frederickson et al., 2004; Killoran et al., 2007; Mittler, 2012).
The teaching staff noted that if the government provided more funding for each student in the integrated group, then the KCCCCs would be able to arrange more activities, workshops, and seminars for the families in order to nurture the young disabled children and create a sense of belonging for the children and their family members. (Gottwald & Pardy, 1977; Killoran et al., 2007).

The government should assign more funding to integrated KCCCCs so they could employ more teaching assistants to care for the young children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Lowering the student-teacher ratio is a critical issue in working with disabled children (Buysse et al., 1999; O’Brien, 2001).

**Assign More Funding to Employ Professionals**

The findings in this study indicated that there were not enough professionals (such as psychologists, speech therapists, and social workers) assigned to work with the young disabled children and their families. More professionals were needed in order to provide appropriate training for the young children with disabilities (Frederickson et al, 2004; T. M. Smith & Duncan, 2004).

**Increased Teacher Training in ECSE**

An effective integration policy needs to provide adequate teacher training in early childhood special education (ECSE) in order to help young disabled children (Diamond et al., 1994). Teacher training is crucial to furnishing the knowledge and skills necessary for working with children with disabilities and influencing the child’s development (Buysse et al., 2003; Killoran et al., 2007; Powell, Diamond, Burchinal, & Koehler, 2010). Quality teacher training might also ensure that people around the young disabled children also benefitted (Knoche et al., 2006).

The findings in this study strongly suggested that, in addition to the special education teachers needing to refresh their knowledge regularly, all principals and
mainstream teachers in integrated KCCCCs should receive at least basic training in ECSE. Appropriate training in ECSE could give them the knowledge and skills they need to better manage the integrated KCCCCs and effectively meet the needs of young children with disabilities and their parents (R. Smith & Leonard, 2005). Furthermore, through taking part in training, the mainstream teachers would likely gain greater confidence and more positive attitudes and beliefs about young children with disabilities (Giangreco, Dennis, Coinger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993). As mentioned, retraining could help the special education teachers teach more effectively and efficiently through familiarization with the latest approaches for teaching young children with disabilities.

Sufficient funding could encourage KCCCCs to implement a variety of staff development programs, such as school-based workshops and professional seminars (Evans, Keating, & Knight, 2000; G. Llewellyn et al., 2002; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Hence, the government should allot funding to institutions, such as the Centre for Special Needs and Studies in Inclusive Education (CSNSIE) at the Hong Kong Institute of Education that could offer in-service courses to all teaching staff at mainstream KCCCCs with the integrated program. The CSNSIE can provide the knowledge and skills required by the teaching staff in integrated KCCCCs.

**Improving Instructions for Implementing the Program**

The findings in this study strongly suggested publishing a more detailed handbook that provided clearer guidelines and practical policies for teachers who teach young disabled children in mainstream KCCCCs. This would enhance effective cooperation and communication between special and mainstream teachers as they help young disabled children and their peers. Through reading and implementing policy from such a handbook, the principals and teaching staff could also learn about different ways to manage the integrated program for young children with disabilities.
Increasing Places in the Integrated Program

This study showed that increasing resources for the integrated program in mainstream KCCCCs could facilitate better outcomes for young disabled children. In addition, program expansion and reduced wait times would allow KCCCCs to cater to a larger number of young children with disabilities. If they could more quickly find an appropriate school as soon as they were identified with a disability, this early intervention would help these young disabled children minimize their limitations and maximize their potential (Kid Source, 2005). This would ease the stress on the young disabled children’s family because their children could more immediately receive appropriate training in a proper school environment (Kid Source, 2005).

Increasing External Support for the Integrated Program

This study suggested that the quality of integrated KCCCCs depended on regular monitoring of the programs. Through close monitoring of the integrated program, the government could gain a deeper understanding of the quality of services offered and needed in integrated KCCCCs, such as staffing; special and mainstream curriculum content; instructional arrangements; environmental structure; and collaboration among professionals, teaching staff, and parents. This monitoring would also strengthen communication between the government and the teaching staff in integrated KCCCCs. This connection would improve the success of integrated programs in mainstream KCCCCs.

The Hong Kong government should review and evaluate the effectiveness of the program and its impact on young disabled children and their families to ensure the quality of the policy (Jobling & Gavidia-Payne, 2002; T. M. Smith & Duncan, 2004). In this way, the policymakers could determine whether the program meets its stated objectives
and establish mechanisms to ensure that the curriculum and services at integrated KCCCCs fulfil the needs and development of each individual child.

**Facilitating a Smooth Transition**

A quality integrated policy should help young children with disabilities in integrated KCCCCs transition into the new educational environment of primary school (Cook et al., 2007). During the transition period, the young disabled child and his or her parents need appropriate help from relevant parties, such as the government and the KCCCC the child attends (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Dogaru, 2007; Sink, Edwards, & Weir, 2007). From the evidence gained in this study, it seems that there was no systematic plan, such as clear guidelines and consultation time, for helping young disabled children’s parents make a smooth transition from integrated KCCCCs to primary schools. On-going assessments would be beneficial and ensure that parents and teachers had continuous information about the child’s overall development to determine which type of primary school the child should attend. In addition, there was a demonstrated need for the teaching staff at integrated KCCCCs to monitor the progress of the young disabled children on a continuous basis (Haley, Hammond, Ingalls, & Marin, 2013; Pretzel & Hiemenz, 2004). This would help the parents of young disabled children have a better understanding of their child’s strengths and weaknesses and then identify the most appropriate primary school for the child (Sainato & Lyon, 1989; Sainato & Morrison, 2000). Integrated KCCCCs and parents need to communicate frequently. Through collaboration, parents can gain adequate information about the new educational environments, such as their mission, vision, and curriculum (Campbell, 1997; Kirk et al., 2006). This can furnish them with a better understanding of the new educational environment.
Improving Structural Quality

The environments at the Hong Kong integrated KCCCCs need to be appropriately structured, with the classrooms arranged to enhance the young children’s, especially disabled children’s, education (Sandall & Schwartz, 2002; Wolery, 1994c). Hence, the teaching staff in Hong Kong integrated KCCCCs must remember that young children in KCCCC classrooms have basic environmental needs, for example, appropriately sized, comfortable, sturdy, and accessible toilets and furniture (Noonan, 2006a; Odom & Bailey, 2001; Sandall & Schwartz, 2002; Wolery, 1994c).

A classroom setting should provide sufficient and suitable space to allow young disabled children to communicate easily with their peers and adults and engage in various activities (Odom & Bailey, 2001; O’Brien, 2001). Furthermore, an appropriate ratio of children to teachers would encourage better participation and communication between young disabled children and their peers (Odom & Bailey, 2001).

Appropriate and Flexible Instruction

Appropriate curricular and functional methods can support the unique needs of young disabled children at each developmental stage. Through play-based activities in mainstream classrooms, all young children, including the young disabled, can select activities according to their own interests and learn through play (Bray & Cooper, 2007; Ferraioli & Harris, 2011; Galant & Hanline, 1993; Odom & Bailey, 2001). Thus, the special and mainstream teachers should enhance the children’s self-confidence to participate in activities through peer interaction, encouragement, and reinforcement (Kirk et al., 2006; Sandall et al., 2002).

This study showed that the young disabled children at KCCCCs participated in the standard curriculum with their non-disabled peers in mainstream classrooms; thus, the mainstream teachers need to be flexible and appropriately adjust the learning outcomes.
In order to enrich each individual child’s abilities and strengths, the mainstream teachers should adapt the curriculum to suit the needs and developmental stage of each child (Alston & Kilam, 2004; Clair, Church, & Batshaw, 2002; Odom & Bailey, 2001; Powell et al., 2010). Enhancing the social and emotional development of young disabled children in integrated classrooms is also very important.

The findings in this study strongly suggested that curriculum design and activities should enhance the daily opportunities for young disabled children. Various opportunities provided by special and mainstream teachers could help young disabled children have more chances to communicate and interact with their peers (Cook et al., 2007; McCormick, 2006b; Sasha, 2013). Apart from that, KCCCs need to include daily small group activities as well as one-on-one training to develop different skills, promote children’s social development, and provide opportunities for the young disabled children to interact with adults, including their teachers and caregivers (File, 1994; Hauser-Cram et al., 1993; Lerner et al., 2003; Nabors et al., 1997).

Aside from curriculum planning, parents could participate in structuring the IEPs and in-home training programs. Participation in curriculum planning could enhance the quality of the curriculum offered to the young disabled children because the teachers could gain greater understanding about the children through listening to, and working with, their parents (Bowe, 2007; Fish, 2006; McCormick, 2006a; T. E. Smith et al., 2015).

In addition to inviting the parents of young disabled children to aid in the curriculum, special and mainstream teachers should work closely and collaboratively with each other to adjust the curriculum offered to each disabled child to ensure its appropriateness and flexibility. For example, the special and mainstream teachers can develop mutual curriculum goals for the disabled children and share teaching materials and resources (Bowe, 2007; R. Smith & Leonard, 2005; Turk, 2012).
**Promoting the Quality of Professional Work**

The results of this study indicated that Hong Kong integrated KCCCCs should adopt and implement regular professional support (e.g., psychologists and therapists). Suggestions provided by therapists could help parents with in-home training programs as well as facilitate the children’s daily lives at school (Hurley & Horn, 2010; Mackey & McQueen, 1998; McWilliam et al., 2001; Sekerak et al., 2003).

In addition to providing wide-ranging therapeutic programs to the young disabled children in integrated KCCCCs, a cooperative team of professionals, KCCCC teachers, and families needs to work together to maintain the quality of the integrated program (McWilliam, 1996; Wolfendale, 2000). Hence, a trans-disciplinary team approach could play a significant role in developing an optimal therapeutic program (Boulware, Schwartz, Sandall, & McBride, 2006; Fox, 1997; T. M. Smith & Duncan, 2004). The professionals have to share their knowledge, skills and strategies in order to work collaboratively with teachers and parents to deliver therapeutic programs that enhance the learning activities offered to young disabled children (Barbara et al., 2015; Linder, 1993; Sandall & Schwartz, 2002). Effective communication and collaboration are important in maintaining on-going support, feedback, and recommendations during the process of planning and implementing the programs for young disabled children in the KCCCCs (Linder, 1993; Sandall & Schwartz, 2002). This can help the teachers and parents of a young disabled child know the progress of the therapeutic programs, which will help them follow the training both at school and home to meet his or her individual needs and development stage.

In summary, if the Hong Kong government and mainstream KCCCCs operating the integrated program were to adopt the recommendations listed above, it is likely that the integrated program could be greatly improved.
Further Study

In order to advance the integrated program in Hong Kong mainstream KCCCs, research in the following areas may prove fruitful.

First, in order to understand the needs of each type of young disabled child and whether the strategies employed by the teaching staff for each type of disability are appropriate, it would be helpful to research the experiences of young children with specific types of disabilities (e.g. developmental delay, physical handicap, and hearing impairment) and compare learning styles in Hong Kong integrated KCCCs to strategies employed in similar integrated settings.

Second, one focus of this study was on gaining an understanding of the current practices of KCCC integration and the benefits and weaknesses of KCCC integration for young disabled children and the people around them (such as peers and adults). It would seem appropriate to explore whether there are any barriers affecting the development of young children without disabilities in these integrated classrooms.

Third, due to limitations of scope, it was impossible for this study to interview the parents of children with disabilities. The researcher believes that parental involvement is a key factor in fostering the learning of children with disabilities. The collaboration between teachers and professionals, also known as the home-partnership issue, is another key area for future research.
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The central questions of the proposed research are as follows:

1. What is the background of integration education in Hong Kong’s early childhood education settings in terms of policy and practices?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of principals and teachers with regard to the policy and implementation of the integration program in such settings?
3. How do the teachers undertake their roles and responsibilities in relation to integration education in such settings?
4. Based on the research literature and study findings, what are the recommendations for possible improvement of KCCCC integration?

Guiding questions for Research Question 1

- Who designed the ECE guidelines in Hong Kong?
- What are the current guidelines for integration education at KCCCs?
- What changes have been implemented in the past?
- What resources are available for planning integration education in Hong Kong’s KCCCs?
- What factors have been considered during planning, and what is its progress?
- What will be included in the integration education curriculum?

Guiding questions for Research Question 2

*Administrative teams*

- What are the duties of the administrative team in planning integration education?
Teachers

- What actual tasks have been carried out by administrative teams in planning integration education?
- What are the duties of teachers in planning integration education?
- What actual tasks have been carried out by teachers in planning integration education and in teaching?

Guiding questions for Research Question 3

Administrative teams

- What issues have arisen in planning integration education?
- How have these issues been dealt with in practice?

Teachers

- What issues have arisen in implementing integration in children’s daily lives?
- What issues have arisen in teaching the integration concept as part of children’s daily lives?
- How have these issues been dealt with in practice?
Appendix A1: Interview Schedule [Chinese]

香港幼兒教育兼收計劃的：背景、主要參與者的角色及關注議題

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參與學校： __________幼兒園

暫定訪問日期：六月中下旬至七月中或十一月至十二月初 (可再商議)

時間：與各受訪者商議

受訪者人數及形式：

1) 校長

形式：個別訪問

預定訪問時間：30-45 分鐘

2) 老師

人數：班內有兼收幼兒或曾教授兼收幼兒的老師 (共 6 名老師)

形式：小組及個別訪問

預定訪問時間：30-45 分鐘

訪問進行地點：受訪學校或合適地點（可再商議）

其他事項：

- 訪問時會進行錄音，以方便日後資料整理。
- 訪問內容只作此研究用途，未經同意不會公開。
- 訪問後若有需要，或會聯絡個別受訪者，再作簡單的訪問，以令所得的資料更準確。
- 訪問時，訪問者會環繞引導問題與受訪者討論，沒有一定的次序，形式會較為輕鬆。
香港幼兒教育兼收計劃的：背景、主要參與者的角色及關注議題

研究人員：許麗平小姐（Ms. Dorothy Hui）

Doctor of Education candidate
University of Western Australia

研究問題

以下為此研究的三大主要研究問題：

1. 現時香港幼稚/兒園有關兼收計劃的教育是建基於什麼背景？

2. 現時香港幼稚/兒園有關兼收計劃的主要參與者（校長、老師、）的角色及工作是什麼？

3. 這批教育主要參與者（校長、老師）對香港幼稚/兒園有關兼收計劃的教育有什麼關注的議題？

問題 1：現時香港幼稚/兒園有關兼收計劃的教育是建基於什麼背景？

引導問題：

• 香港幼兒教育的教學指引是由誰制定？現時香港幼稚/兒園有關兼收計劃課程/教學的指引是什麼？過往數年有什麼改變？

• 有什麼資源提供以助兼收計劃的有關的教學？如何計劃及教授？

• 與兼收計劃的關的教學內容包括什麼？過去數年有何改變？

*（訪問時只需提供簡單已知道的資料便可，不用事前作資料搜集）

問題 2：現時香港幼稚/兒園有關兼收計劃的課程/教育主要參與者（校長、老師）的角色及工作是什麼？

引導問題：

行政人員：校長

於計劃與兼收計劃課程有關的教學內容上，你的職責是什麼？

• 你於日常工作中，在計劃兼收計劃課程有關的教學內容，履行了什麼職務？
老師

- 於計劃及教授兼收計劃課程有關的教學內容上，你的職責是什麼？
- 你於日常工作中，在計劃及教授有關的教學內容上，實行了什麼工作？

問題 3：這批教育主要參與者（校長、老師）對香港幼稚園有關兼收計劃課程/教育有什麼關注的議題？

引導問題：

行政人員：校長

- 於計劃及兼收計劃的有關的教學內容時，曾遇上什麼問題或需關注的事情呢？
- 你如何處理這些問題或需關注的事情呢？

老師

- 於計劃兼收計劃有關的教學內容時，曾遇上什麼問題或需關注的事呢？
- 於教授與兼收計劃課程有關的教學內容時，曾遇上什麼問題或需關注的事情呢？
- 你如何處理這些問題或需關注的事情呢？
Appendix B: Consent Form [English]

Permission Letter for the Interview

Consent Letter for the Principal

Project Title: Integration in Hong Kong Early Childhood Education: Perceptions, Practice and Policy

Dear Principal:

It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in a research project titled Integration in Hong Kong Early Childhood Education: Perceptions, Practice and Policy

I am currently a teaching fellow in the Early Childhood Education Department at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. I will undertake this research as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Western Australia, under the supervision of Professor Tania Aspland.

Using the data generated by you and other participants, I wish to know more about early childhood integration education in Hong Kong. This study will provide important information about teachers’ activities and concerns in early childhood education.

As a kindergarten/child care centre principal, you are in a position to contribute to research about integration in early childhood education. I request your permission to conduct interviews with you and your staff (two interviews, with each lasting about 30-45 minutes), which will be audio taped and transcribed. You will receive a copy of the transcripts before data analysis for verification and further discussion. In addition, I will gather documents, such as curriculum planning, daily lesson plans, and reflection journals, with your consent. This study will have practical implications for the educational development of kindergarten teachers and the development of appropriate educational programs and activities for young children, designed to help them adopt a
positive attitude toward those with special needs. All your contributions to this research will be entirely confidential and your name will not appear in any of the written materials and tapes collected for this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time, in which case the researcher will not use the data you provide.

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants be informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a researcher conducts a project, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s Office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 (telephone number 6488 – 3703).

If you consent to take part in this research, please complete and return the attached form.

You are welcome to discuss any aspect of this research with me (telephone: 2948 6802, email:iphui@eduhk.hk) and my supervisor, Professor Tania Aspland (telephone: 617 5459 4651, email: taspland@usc.edu.ai).

Yours sincerely,

Dorothy Hui

Doctoral student
Appendix B1: Consent Form [English]

Permission Letter for the Interview

Consent Letter for Teachers

Project Title: Integration in Hong Kong Early Childhood Education: Perceptions, Practice and Policy

Dear Teacher:

It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in a research project titled Integration in Hong Kong Early Childhood Education: Perceptions, Practice and Policy.

I am currently a teaching fellow in the Early Childhood Education Department at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. I will undertake this research as partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Western Australia, under the supervision of Professor Tania Aspland.

Using the data generated by you and other participants, I hope to learn more about early childhood integration education in Hong Kong. This study will provide important information about teachers’ activities and concerns in early childhood education.

As a kindergarten teacher/child care worker, you are in a position to contribute to research about integration in early childhood education. I request your permission to conduct interviews with you (two interviews, with each lasting about 30-45 minutes), which will be audio taped and transcribed. You will receive a copy of the transcripts before data analysis for verification and further discussion. In addition, I will gather documents, such as curriculum planning, daily lesson plans and reflection journals, with your consent. This study will have practical implications for the educational development of kindergarten teachers and the development of appropriate educational programs and
activities for young children, designed to help them adopt a positive attitude toward those with special needs. All your contributions to this research will be entirely confidential and your name will not appear in any of the written materials and tapes collected for this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time, in which case, the researcher will not use the data you provide.

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If you consent to take part in this research, please complete and return the

f this research with me (telephone: 2948

or, Professor Tania Aspland (telephone:
親愛的校長：

本人許麗平女士 (Ms. Dorothy Hui), 現為西澳洲大學 (University of Western Australia) 教育博士 (Doctor of Education) 畢業生, 現職香港教育學院幼兒教育學系高級專任導師。本人正進行一項研究，題目為「香港幼兒教育兼收計劃的：背景、主要參與者的角色及關注議題」。誠邀幼稚園老師參與此研究計劃，為此項研究提供寶貴的資料及意見。

資料搜集形式將以訪談進行。研究人員將會與行政人員進行兩次個人的訪問，每次大約為半小時至四十五分鐘。訪問後若有需要，或會聯絡個別受訪者，再作簡單的訪問，以令所得的資料更準確。訪問時會進行錄音，以方便日後資料整理。錄音後的訪問內容亦會於分析前被謄寫，並讓受訪者核對。

訪問內容只作此研究用途，未經同意不會公開，受訪者的真實姓名不會於研究文件中出現。受訪者亦可於此研究進行期間中途退出，之前所提供的資料不會被使用。

老師的參與對此項研究將會十分重要。此項研究的結果，有助日後幼兒兼收計劃課程的編寫及教材設計；亦能幫助學校更能掌握兼收計劃的教學。

如閣下同意參與此研究計劃，請回覆附頁的回條。如若對此計劃有任何查詢，可致電本人 (2948-6802) 或電郵至 lphui@ied.edu.hk。閣下亦可聯絡此研究負責指導的教授 Dr. Tania Aspland (電話：61 4 1181 5071 或電郵 taspland@usc.edu)。

許麗平女士謹啓

二零零九年六月二十九日
親愛的老師：

本人許麗平女士（Ms. Dorothy Hui），現為西澳洲大學（University of Western Australia）教育博士（Doctor of Education）課程學生，現職香港教育學院幼兒教育學系高級專任導師。本人正進行一項研究，題目為「香港幼兒教育兼收計劃的背景、主要參與者的角色及關注議題」。誠邀幼稚園老師參與此研究計劃，為此項研究提供寶貴的資料及意見。

資料搜集形式將以訪談進行。研究人員將會與老師進行一次小組及個人的訪問，時間大約為半小時至四十五分鐘。訪問後若有需要，或會聯絡個別受訪者，再作簡單的訪問，以令所得的資料更準確。訪問時會進行錄音，以方便日後資料整理。錄音後的訪談內容亦會於分析前被謄寫，並讓受訪者核對。

訪問內容只作此研究用途，未經同意不會公開，受訪者的真實姓名不會於研究文件中出現。受訪者亦可於此研究進行期間中途退出，之前所提供的資料不會被使用。

老師的參與對此項研究將會十分重要。此項研究的結果，有助日後幼兒兼收計劃課程的編寫及教材設計；亦能幫助學校更能掌握兼收計劃的教學。

如閣下同意參與此研究計劃，請回覆附頁的回條。如若對此計劃有任何查詢，可致電本人（2948-6802）或電郵至 lphui@ied.edu.hk。閣下亦可聯絡此研究負責指導的教授 Dr. Tania Aspland（電話：61 4 1181 5071 或電郵 taspland@usc.edu）

許麗平女士謹啓

二零零九年六月二十九日
同意參與「香港幼兒教育兼收計劃的背景、主要參與者的角色及關注議題」

研究回條

本人 __________________ 同意參加此項研究。本人已了解此研究計劃的內容，並將會接受半小時至四十五分鐘的訪問（小組和個人訪問）。日後若有需要，研究人員或會與本人作簡單的訪問，以令所得的資料更為準確。本人明白訪問內容只作此研究用途，絕對保密，未經同意不會公開。本人亦知道可於中途退出此研究，之前所搜集的資料不會被使用。若對此項研究有任何疑問，本人知道可聯絡許麗平女士或 Dr. Tania Aspland。

參加者簽名：________________________

日期：聯絡電話：________________________

電郵地址：________________________
APPENDIX C: A list of KCCCC Documents Related to the Integrated Program

1. Government document
2. School meeting record
3. School record for professional help
4. Individualized Education Plan (disabled children)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KCCCC (1) Documents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCCCC (1) Document 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCCCC (1) Document 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCCCC (1) Document (4) IEP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### KCCCC (2) Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Transcript-school document</th>
<th>Topic coding</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KCCCC (2) Document (2)</td>
<td>KCCCC meeting agenda</td>
<td>KCCCCC(2) guidelines for the special education teachers to operate the integrated program</td>
<td>Case study KCCCC (2)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>KCCCC (2) Document (3)</td>
<td>School record for professional help</td>
<td>Disabled child's record</td>
<td>Professional support provided by government</td>
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<tr>
<td>KCCCC (2) Document (3)</td>
<td>School record for professional help</td>
<td>Attendance record</td>
<td>Professional support provided by government</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCCCC (2) IEP (4)</td>
<td>IEP for Ma October 5, 2008 to October 16, 2008</td>
<td>Transcript-Curriculum (IEP) 1. Skills to improve -Fine motor: Co-ordination of two hands and skills of folding paper - Fold a paper into shape of house, draw windows and door</td>
<td>IEP for disabled child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix D: Interview Coding Protocol

**Table of coding—Interview—Part 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Name (interviewees)</th>
<th>Transcript (Interview Response)</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the functions of the teachers in relation to the integration education in such setting?</td>
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<td>Different viewpoints on the integrated program</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher Ho, June 29, 2009</td>
<td>協助有特殊需要的小朋友融合在常規的教學裏，以及與其他小朋友享有同等的教育機會。</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To help young disabled children integrate in mainstream programs, and let them have equal opportunities to learn with other young children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal Wong, July 7, 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td>兼收服務的原則是讓特殊需要的小朋友，能夠融入社會，將自己短處的地方改善，盡快幫助他們歸隊，讓他們能夠享有平等受教育的機。</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Perceptions and Attitudes</td>
<td>Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009</td>
<td>The principles of the integrated program are to allow young disabled children to improve their weaknesses and to help them join with the mainstream as soon as possible and let them have equal opportunities in education.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>我們是按照社會福利處的指引，安排日常的課程，協助有特殊需要的小朋友融合在常規教學裡，以及其他小朋友享有同等的教育機會。 Teachers follow guidance form SWD and arrange the curriculum in daily class based on the needs of young disabled children. Let young disabled children enjoy equal opportunities...Then, they can get benefits for their all-round development.</td>
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<td>Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009</td>
<td>兼收課程提供了一個合適的環境，讓有特殊需要的幼兒與同儕有溝通的機會。透過日常的活動，他們可以有機會模倣同儕的學習。特別是體能動作，語言的，社交技巧等。我們提供個別教學化計劃，邀請班內幼兒一同進行，透過同儕互動的安排，協助幼兒學習。</td>
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<td>The integrated program setting is a suitable environment and learning atmosphere for young disabled children as there is peer interaction. Through learning and playing with peers, disabled children can have a chance to imitate process is especially obvious in motor, language, social, and cognitive development. We provide individualized educational programs for them and invite other children to help them to strengthen their weak attention. Young disabled children will gradually succeed through interactive learning environments.</td>
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<td>Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>我們會先做評估，看看他的能力和實際年齡相差多少，我們會在課程上編排適合他的課程：我們課程會跟組裏的主題教學，我們會用內容編排，如小肌肉上，可能剪紙技巧不是太靈活，如同齡幼兒有差距，我們會在課程上編排，如主題正在做什麼，我們會加強他這方面的訓練。</td>
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<td>We evaluate the child to classify the difference, weakness, ability, and actual age of young disabled children. Then we design a course to suit disabled children. We develop the curriculum following the themes and daily practices. For example, fine motor training: If the young disabled child is not skilled in cutting paper, we will emphasise that area in his or her daily class activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009</td>
<td>語言溝通及社交技巧是有改善的，老師及父母都說幼兒的溝通技巧有所改善如語句的組織及表達等。</td>
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<td>Language communication and social skills are improved. Most young disabled children also have communication problems. Teachers and parents mentioned that the children improve in language presentation and organizational skills as they communicate with their children.</td>
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<p>| Principal Chiu, personal interview, January 10, 2010 | 然而，兼收課程能協助幼兒改善弱項，有助幼兒融入同儕的學習，因為每個幼兒都能享有珍貴及平等的學習機會。 |
| Through the integrated program, young children with... difficulties can improve their weaknesses to help them join with the mainstream group as soon as possible and develop at the same pace as young children of the same age... On the whole, every child is precious: let them have |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Principal Au, personal interview, June 30 2009)</th>
<th>equal opportunities in education.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>希望一些有特殊需要的小朋友，如輕度智障、弱能，能在主流學校有平等機會學習，在一個群體裏學習，讓他們不會覺得自己很特別。</td>
<td>Let young disabled children, such as the mildly or physically disabled, enjoy equal opportunities to learn with their peer groups. Then they will not think they are so different.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)</td>
<td>我覺得除了兼收老師與特殊小朋友做特別的訓練外，另外，讓他們與普通小朋友上課時，令特殊小朋友能夠與普通小朋友融匯在一起，普通組幼兒又可以在自然環境下融合到特殊小朋友，一起去進行活動、上課、遊戲、學習等。</td>
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<td>I think that apart from providing individual education program for young disabled children, we should also allow these children a chance to integrate. Furthermore,</td>
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</table>
normal ones can also learn to integrate with the young disabled ones in a natural environment; they can have activities, lessons, games, and learning together.

(Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

assist young children in joining mainstream society and having equal rights in education.

(Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

Although young disabled children in integrated classes may not make the first move, they will play if their non-disabled peers invite them to play. The integrated program provides them the chance to get along with others and to increase their confidence... Assist young
Negative Perceptions and Attitudes

Problems in daily practice.

(Mainstream Teacher Lam, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

We can’t pay too much attention to young disabled children as we have to take care of 14-15 children in the class and we are not clear about what problems they have... We let them do the same activity as their non-disabled peers in daily practices. Their schedules

我們不能用太多時間在有特殊需要的幼兒上，因班內還有14-15名幼兒需要照顧，所以只好讓他們一起做相似的活動，但有特殊需要的幼兒，在進度上要有調節。例如：小肌肉發展遲緩的幼兒，就不可要求他們書寫與班內幼兒一樣，必須作出調整。
should not be too rigid. For example, if a young child has co-ordination problems, he may find it difficult to write. He may only be able to write simple words at first, and may feel it is hard to follow the work of non-disabled children.

(Mainstream Teacher Mok, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

I know that young disabled children might affect others. A young child who always yells out and has emotional problems will affect others’ learning; or a child who always attacks his peers will be avoided. As a result of such problems in classroom management, some teachers do not like young disabled children.

我也發現，有特殊需要的幼兒在課室內有情緒問題出現時，會影響課室管理及同儕對他們的感覺。
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unfairness to young children without disabilities.</th>
<th>(Mainstream Teacher Cheng, personal interview, June 23, 2010).</th>
<th>It is unfair to young non-disabled children. When the teacher needs to spend more time with young disabled children, it takes away a learning opportunity for the whole class.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A burden to KCCCC and teaching staff</td>
<td>(Principal Wong personal interview, July 7, 2009)</td>
<td>Those suffering from mental handicaps have limitations; they are usually not up to the standard of the mainstream curricula and can’t always catch up with the class activities. The mainstream teachers feel exhausted and frustrated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Mainstream Teacher Ng, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

近日，我們收了一名嚴重的自閉兒，他三歲。雖然他很聰明，而且大小肌的技能沒有問題，唯有情緒很低。其實，他不能夠說話，在我班上的 13 位小朋友也是三歲，所有小朋友，包括這位自閉兒也喜歡玩玩具，但是這自閉兒卻在上課時玩。由於他在課堂上玩，若拿走她的玩具她便情緒很低落。

Recently, an autistic child with severe problems was admitted in my class. She was 3 years old. Generally, she has no problem on gross and fine motor skills but her emotional level and communication skills are low. The other 14 children in my class are also 3-year-olds. It’s difficult for me to manage while she has emotional problems.

(Mainstream Teacher Lai, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

因為我們沒有特別受訓，我們不懂如何去教導，及設計一個較為適當的課程，協助特殊需要的幼兒。

Sometimes mainstream and special education teachers may not know
how to manage and design a proper curriculum for young disabled children as they don’t have adequate professional knowledge.

(Mainstream Teacher Lee, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

I believed that mainstream teachers would also feel anxious. This semester the young children accepted by us are mostly autistic and so at the start of semester many of them have emotional problems, such as running around and shouting... Teachers need to spend a lot of time to deal with this. Teachers need to use more time for classroom management and teaching.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)</th>
<th>特殊教育幼兒課程, 主要提供給特殊教育工作人員, 一般教師及校長很難申請。</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For teachers’ training, it seems that only special education teachers can apply. It is difficult for mainstream teachers, even principals, to apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)</td>
<td>近年, 一年的在職訓練,只提供予特殊教育的老師, 但內容的教授基本的策略, 未能學到具體的方法, 如 ：如何協助有情緒問題的幼兒等。對新入職的特殊教育老師, 也對這感到困難。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Currently, the 1-year training course is only provided for the special education teachers. In fact, one year of basic on-the-job training is not enough for us to learn different teaching strategies for many aspects. Even the special education teachers may not learn many of the ways of dealing with young children’s behavioural problems. Especially the</td>
</tr>
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</table>
new special education teachers may lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of the reasons for the behaviour of young disabled children.

Teacher training is not enough, SWD should provide more resources for KCCCs. Currently we can get information from organizations such as Heep Hong Society and The Spastics Association of Hong Kong. Early childhood education has kept changing; however, we have inadequate teacher training. SWD needs to provide updated information every few years. This can help us adopt the latest information and can

(Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 14, 2010)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Special Education Teacher Cheung, personal interview, July 7, 2009)</th>
<th>refresh our knowledge and strategies for teaching young disabled children.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>我們是有機會報讀短期課程，但有時未必適合我們當時的需要，希望日後可提供一些更有規劃的訓練。</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We only have the chance to attend the short-term courses managed by the different organizations. The topics are diverse and may not suit our needs. I hope to be given more opportunity for study and systematic training about special education in the future.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)</td>
<td>主流老師很大壓力，因為我們沒有特別受訓，我們不懂如何去教導，如何去對待特殊小朋友</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The difficulty is that we [mainstream teachers] receive just a basic knowledge about special education, yet we need to handle young children with severe problems. Once I also saw a young disabled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
child bite his peer and then laugh after biting. That was really unfair to the children... The teachers didn’t know how to solve the problem!

(Special Education Teacher Kwok, January 17, 2010)

The government should allocate more resources to teacher training, not only for special education teachers, but also for mainstream teachers to systematically study special education. Then they can learn the basic skills and be able to solve disabled children’s behaviour problems.

(Special Education Teacher Yuen, July 7, 2009)

主要的憂慮是，我的校長也没有相間的特殊教育訓練，要用多一些時間向她解釋情況。

The main concern ...is my principal lacks processional training about special education. She may not truly understand the integrated program and
<p>| | | |</p>
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<tr>
<td>young disabled children, so I need to explain and talk more with the principal.</td>
<td>(Principal Cheng, personal interview, January 14, 2010)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>我想所有老師都需要接受特殊教育訓練，才可對特殊需要的幼兒，有進一步的了解。</td>
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<td>I think it is necessary for all teachers in integrated KCCCCs to have training in special education, then they can get a better understanding and acceptance of young disabled children’</td>
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<td>(Special Education Teacher Chan, personal interview, June 29, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>政府提供多一些資源或在進修相關的課程後，也定期提供合適的支援，在我們的工作也有很大的幫助</td>
<td>政府提供多一些資源或在進修相關的課程後，也定期提供合適的支援，在我們的工作也有很大的幫助</td>
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<td>Actually, the government should provide more resources for special education teacher training. Teachers who have basic skills are more confident in teaching young children with special needs, and children can get appropriate support’.</td>
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</table>
Professional Help: Allied Health Services Provided by the Government

(Special Education Teacher Kwok, January 17, 2010)

父母認為幼兒園邀請心理學家及語言治療師舉行講座，有助他們在日常生活協助幼兒學習。

Parents think that KCCCC seminars with invited psychologists and language therapists are useful in helping them cope with their children’.

(Mainstream Teacher Yip, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

心理學家在上一學年沒有來探訪幼兒，一般而言他半年來一次，或在以往若家長有需，可先預約時間見面的。真的希望他一年至少一次，才可協助幼兒學習。

The clinical psychologist has not visited for a year. He used to come every half year. He used to come when there was a special request by parents... I hope that the clinical psychologist can visit our school at least once a year, and discuss problems with the parents of young disabled children.
(Mainstream Teacher Ku, personal interview, July 6, 2009)

以往心理學家會不定期的來跟進幼兒，但現在他一年只來一次，兼收組的幼兒學習上變化很大，若他能半年來一次作出跟進會較合適。

The clinical psychologist could visit more often. Now, he seems to come to the KCCCC once a year. It would be better if he could come once in 6 months, as there are many changes and uncertainty in children with special needs even in 6 months. If the clinical psychologist could make more regular visits, the follow-up and monitoring for disabled children will be better.

(Principal Wu, personal interview, June 22, 2010)

社會福利署提供的專業支援，非常有限。如物理治療師和職業治療師，他們大約三至四個月才來一次跟進相關的幼兒，每節的時間很短，提供一些建議給特殊教育老師，但我不清楚老師能否真的完全明白及作出跟進。
Professional support is provided by SWD but the frequency and the actual time spent in the KCCCC is very limited. It is even worse for the physiotherapists and occupational therapists. They only visit the school once every 3 to 4 months and the training session is short. Only suggestions are made for training the young disabled children. I doubt whether special education teachers could follow up with the training appropriately.

(Principal Chiu, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

但是，我們特殊教育老師沒有接受過語言訓練的課程，所以真的希望語言治療師可增加訪校次數，有助改善幼兒的語言。近年來，我們幼兒園有語言問題的幼兒多了，若治療師能每兩星期來訪校一次會更好，因為我們有十二位有特殊需要的幼兒，特殊教育老師可因應語言治療師的建議，作出跟進。

Special education teachers do not receive training in speech therapy. I really hope that the speech
therapist can increase his visiting time so that the young children who have language problems can improve. Currently, KCCCCs tend to have more children with language problems. If the speech therapist visits every 2 weeks (as we have two integrated groups) then the special education teachers can adjust their learning plan after they receive suggestions from the speech therapist.

(Mainstream Teacher Yau, personal interview, June 30, 2009)

Lately, the speech therapist visits the KCCCC more often than before. I think this helps the young children improve. The special education teachers’ follow-up work on the children’s conditions is much better. In addition, we seldom communicate with the occupational therapists,
| Physical Support | Admission policy | physiotherapists, and psychologists, which is the main concern about young disabled children’s learning. | year,兼收位的需求，有上升的趋势，一般社署會要求學校多收一至二名，或要求學校多收一组。令我的同事的壓力大增。 

Currently, it takes quite a long time for the disabled to be admitted. The SWD requires integrated KCCCCs to admit more than usual, such as seven to eight young disabled children into a group, or even to operate two groups. This creates much pressure on my colleagues. |

| (Principal Wu, personal interview, June 22, 2010) | (Principal Au, personal interview, June 30, 2009) | 幼兒園的位置是與他們輪候時間絕對有影响，在一些較近市區的位置，一般要等多過半年時間，才可入讀。

The location of the KCCCC is the major issue affecting the admission of the student numbers. For |
example, in some districts you have to wait for more than half a year for admission.

(Mainstream Teacher Ng, personal interview, July 7, 2009)  
提供多一些兼收位，避免有特殊需要的幼儿等候过长的时间，而在等候期间父母会感到无助及失望。所以政府应提供多一些机会给与有特殊需要的幼儿。

Such long waiting periods could delay young disabled children’s learning progress and development: More places for the integrated program KCCCCs are needed to avoid waiting times. During the long waiting times, parents of young disabled children feel helpless and disappointed. The government should provide more opportunities for young disabled children to learn in mainstream KCCCCs.

| Funding policy | (Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009) | 我们一般用资助的费用购买一些新的教学资源及安排一些家长活动，如聚餐等，邀请旧生的家长 |
分享他們的子女就讀小一的經驗。

We usually spend the money buying some teaching materials in order to replace the old ones and update the teaching resources. We also arrange some activities for parents, like a buffet, and invite old students’ parents to share the experiences of their children, who are now studying in primary schools.

(Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010)

安排活動時，希望可以招待，多一些有特殊需要幼兒的家人，藉此加強家校合作的關係，但因資金有限，未能辦到。

When we arrange activities for families of young disabled children, we also hope that more family members could attend as this can develop communication between school and parents and enhance the family unit. However, the funding was limited. This really affects the quality of the activities.
(Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010)

I use the funding for arranging activities. I invited parents to assist in the activity. If the activity was out of budget, I will buy teaching and learning materials for the program on my own. So the SWD should allot more money to each of the integrated groups.

(Principal Wong, personal interview, July 7, 2009)

If there was more money from the government, we could buy more teaching and learning materials such as perceptual-motor equipment. The SWD should not only allow us [the integrated groups] to use the money to arrange activities, but also agree to us making use of the money to purchase teaching materials that can
| (Principal Chiu, personal interview, January 10, 2010) | 我想，資助尚算足夠，我們用來舉辦一些活動。來特殊需要幼兒的家人可一起參與。

I think the money provided by SWD is OK because we only spend it on organizing the activities for the (disabled) children and their family members’. |
| (Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010) | 我們常常 購買各樣的教學資源，有助園內所有幼兒學習，有助推廣融合教育。

We always purchase resources for all young children in the KCCCC. We have only bought books and some teaching materials... We also use money from the integrated program for providing whole school activities. Because the Integrated program advocates that all children participate in mainstream classrooms, we use this money to purchase learning and |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Special Education Teacher Chan, personal interview, June 29, 2010)</th>
<th>teaching materials appropriate for implementing and facilitating the integrated curriculum in mainstream classrooms.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Mainstream Teacher Mok, personal interview, January 10, 2010)</td>
<td>In preparation for the therapy sessions, I needed to finish the documentation work before they could be conducted... If the government allocates more money to employ teaching assistants to help young disabled children, this can help reduce the load of implementing the integrated program. Then the teachers can teach.</td>
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<td>In preparation for the therapy sessions, I needed to finish the documentation work before they could be conducted... If the government allocates more money to employ teaching assistants to help young disabled children, this can help reduce the load of implementing the integrated program. Then the teachers can teach.</td>
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</table>
| (Special Education Teacher Kwok, personal interview, January 17, 2010) | This KCCCC environment and its furniture are old and unfit for class activities... The government should allot us [the integrated KCCCC] more money to reconstruct the KCCCC environment and purchase new furniture. This would help provide a suitable and stimulating environment for the young children to play and learn in daily.

| | 課程指引不夠充足，除了有一些治療師派發的資料外，社會福利處，很少有清晰的指引，特別是關於特殊幼兒的課程指引。

<p>| | There is not enough guidance for teaching strategies or for curriculum planning. Generally speaking, there are some documents sent to the KCCCCs on psychological therapies, on occupational therapy, and on physiological therapy. In addition, there is less from the Social Welfare Department, especially the curriculum guidebook. |
| (Special Education Teacher Leung, personal interview, June 23, 2010) | 一般我們會與其他幼兒園溝通，用最合適的方法教導幼兒。若社會福利處能派發相關的手冊，例如：怎樣預備合適的教材等…… |
| | To make alliance with different KCCCCS, it would be better if the government issued a handbook outlining the responsibilities and roles of special education teachers and mainstream teachers, and effective ways of educating and taking care of young disabled children. For example, preparing teaching materials based on collaborative decisions. |
| (Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009) | 個別化教學計劃，為每一個有特殊需要的幼兒度身訂造，強化他們的弱項，例如：有一位發展遲緩的幼兒，在不同的範疇也較弱，但總有他的弱項。 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The training program (IEP) needs to be tailor-made to meet their weaknesses in order to foster the children’s skills and learning progress. Young disabled children are weak in certain areas; they may have advantages in other areas. For example, a young child who is a slow learner may have good motor skills.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Mainstream Teacher Lai, Personal interview, July 6, 2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>父母讓幼兒就讀兼收學校，好讓他們可以和年齡相若的幼兒有多相處的機會。 Parents let them study at KCCCs with an integrated setting, help them to lead a normal life, and to learn and play with young children of a similar age; they can get fully involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mainstream Teacher Wu, personal interview, July 7, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>讓有特殊需要的幼兒有更多的探索機會及與他人互動的時間，從而強化他們的弱項，及使他們融入課室內的活動，更容易被班內幼兒接受。 We need to let young disabled children have</td>
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<td>(Special Education Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Special Education Teacher Leung, personal interview, June 30, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Ho, personal interview, June 29, 2009</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Chan, personal interview, June 23, 2010</td>
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政府應盡力推廣共融教育的理念。讓更多的市民理解兼收的意義及推廣致與小一銜接課程。

The government should do its best to promote and explain to all people in society the purpose of the integrated program at KCCCs. Government should let people know more about the integration program... As sectors of early childhood education are merged, all pre-primary settings, not only KCCCs, should offer the integrated program.
**CASE STUDY KCCCC (1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Example interview responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The KCCCC environment and facilities, teaching resources, staff numbers, and professional training | The KCCCC (1) facility and environment | 我們幼兒園是開放式間格，對有聽障的幼兒不太適合，之前有一位，參觀後放棄入讀我們的幼兒園。

Our centre is an open area and not a good choice for children who have hearing problems. Previously, there was one young child who suffered from hearing impairment. After making a visit to our KCCCC, his parents understood that the environment at our KCCCC might not be suitable for his child and he finally gave up his place here. (Special Education Teacher, June 29, 2009) |

| The special education teacher at KCCCC (1) | | 我們跟據治療師評估的報告，焦點的改善他們的弱項，因應他們的能力給合適的幫助，及提供同儕間相互模倣的學習，這是在特殊學校較難辦到。 |
We can focus on the weaknesses of young disabled children, and provide training based on the children’s ability. And we can adjust the progress after the observation and evaluation by therapists. Young disabled children learn through observing and imitating normal children. They cannot have the chance to learn, and cannot benefit much, if they stay in special schools (Special Education teacher Ho, June 29, 2009; KCCCC (1) IEP Document (1), 2009).

Usually, KCCCCs could promote social harmony via the school activities because, through the integrated program, people, including the non-disabled children and their
<table>
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<tr>
<th>The mainstream teachers at KCCCC (1)</th>
<th>Because of the financial problems, we are unable to provide any training for the teachers. For the benefits to all children, we prefer to hire a janitor to provide assistance. This must be cheaper though. (Principal Au, June 30, 2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parents, could learn to accept that young children with disabilities had different abilities but were essentially the same as they were (Special Education Teacher Ho, June 29, 2009)</td>
<td>我們不能為老師提供額外或相間的訓練，所以我選擇多請一名僱工，也可協助照顧幼兒，因為請助教的資比較高。 I prefer to hire a janitor to provide assistance to look after the young disabled</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
children. It is much cheaper than hiring an additional teacher. Sometimes they would help teachers look after the other children in class or if they went out for a visit. (Principal Au, June 30, 2009)

If mainstream teachers have training in special education before teaching the mainstream class with young disabled children, we can identify the problem and have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of disabled children that we can coordinate with the special education teacher. (Mainstream Teacher Quah, June 29, 2009)
### CASE STUDY KCCCC (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Example interview responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>The KCCCC environment and facilities, teaching resources, staff numbers, and professional training</td>
<td>The KCCCC (2) facility and environment</td>
<td>機構在以往提供一些資金購買教學資源，及一些物理治療諮詢給特殊幼兒的家長。</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The association previously funded our centre to purchase toys and storybooks for young disabled children studying in the integrated program and provided physiotherapy consultations for parents of young disabled children. (Principal Wong, July 7, 2009)

輔導的房間比較細，不能進行小組活動，所以只好與其他老師共用一個課室但效果不太好。

The counselling room was small, and it’s not enough to form small group activities for young disabled children. Due to the limited space, two classes share use of the
### Principal, mainstream, and special education teachers’ perception and accounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room. Sometimes the noise from one group affects the other. It would be better if there was only one class in the room. (Special Education Teacher Cheung, July 7, 2009)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I only completed 30 hours of basic knowledge in special education... Honestly, it is not enough for me, and it’s difficult for me to give advice to my teachers about the integrated program. We have gone by trial and error. Education requires experience. Due to these concerns, I applied for entry to a one-year part-time program on special education a few years ago, but was unsuccessful, because they give priority to the ones who teach it. (Principal Wong, July 7, 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The principal at KCCCC (2)
I did not admit young children with emotional and behavioural difficulties because I thought they would create too much pressure and difficulty for the teachers. I only admitted young children with mild disabilities into the integrated program. (Principal Wong, July 7, 2009)