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Hong Kong Special Schools Music Teachers' Perceptions of Creativity and their Practices in Music Classrooms for Students with Severe Intellectual Disabilities

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Background

- Under the principle of “one curriculum framework for all”, students with intellectual disabilities [ID] in Hong Kong special schools follow the same curriculum framework as their counterparts in mainstream schools.
- “Developing creativity and imagination” is one of the four learning targets of the *Music Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)* (CDC, 2003).
- There are 41 special schools for students with ID: 10 for mild ID; 14 for moderate ID; 7 for mild & moderate ID; 10 for severe ID (EDB, 2015).

Definitions of Creativity

- Teachers define as a subject-specific experience that requires imagination and intelligence (Mullet, Willerson, Lamb, & Kettler, 2016).
- Pope (2005) defines creativity as the “capacity to make, do or become something fresh and valuable with respect to others as well as ourselves” (p. xvi)
- Steers (2014) regards creativity as a common human attribute that “most people regularly solve problems of all kinds in their daily lives with some degree of creativity” (p. 165)

Teachers' perceptions about Students' Creativity

- Judgements for their favorite students were negatively correlated with creativity (Westby & Dawson, 1995); Students who perform well in school as creative (Gralewski & Karwowski, 2013)
- Creative students are more disruptive and more resistant to conform/adhere to school policies (Scott, 1999); Ignore/disregard creative students that exhibit misbehaviors (Gralewski & Karwowski, 2013)
- Influenced by teachers' musical and professional experiences and expertise (Odena & Welch, 2012); Low level of confidence in T's content knowledge influence their reaction to students' creative responses (Beghetto, 2009)
- Believed that creativity is a way to transcend the education gap for disadvantaged students (Munns, Sawyer & Cole, 2012).

Factors that may influence Students' Development of Creativity

- The pressure to conform and personal feeling of shyness (Kiehn, 2003); (Cole, Mooney & Power, 2012)
- Formal, informal instruction and prior musical experiences (Burnard & Younker, 2004)
- Use of assessment methods and feedback on students' work (Byrne et al., 2003; Burnard & Power, 2014).
- Teachers' experiences and training (Crow, 2008)
- Application of digital technology
 - of mainstream students (Loveless, 2003) and students with special educational needs [SEN] (Adkins et al., 2012; Collins, 1992; McCord, 2004); students with SEN could improvise music with organized structure (Orsmond & Miller, 1995); students with SEN could compose music (Bell, 2008).

Rationale & Purpose

RATIONALE

- Students with intellectual disabilities are traditionally being negatively perceived as students with low capabilities (Scior, 2011).
- Developing creativity in music education for students with ID seems to be a mission impossible and has been a major challenge for music teachers in special schools.
- Music teachers' perceptions about creativity in music learning for students with intellectual disabilities may influence their choice of curriculum emphasis and instructional strategies in music lessons.
- There is a lack of research literature in the area of creativity of students with intellectual disabilities.

PURPOSE

- To explore special schools music teachers' perceptions of creativity and their practices in music education for students with severe intellectual disabilities [SSID]

Research Questions

1. What are music teachers' perceptions about creativity in music education for students with severe intellectual disabilities [SSID]?
2. What are the observed practices of creativity in the music classrooms for SSID?

Methodology

- **Constructivist approach:** Meanings are subject to social construction or cultural interpretations, and can be fluid rather than fixed. Results are judged by the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability instead of validity and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).
- **Qualitative research tools:** Face-to-face interviews and classroom observations
- **Multiple-case study:** 3 music teachers' cases
- **Purposeful sampling criteria:** The participants (1) Are in-service music teachers of special schools for students with SID; (2) Allow the researcher to observe and video-record one of their music classes for four lessons according to the participants' choices of class and lessons; (3) Available for an initial interview, 4 pre-observation interviews, 4 post-observation interviews and a final interview.

Data collection & Analysis

Identical data collection procedures for all 3 cases:

(1) a initial interview; (2) 4 pre-observation interviews + 4 lesson observations + 4 post-observation interviews with video elicitation interview technique (Odena & Welch, 2012); (3) a final interview

Data analysis:

(1) All data were transcribed and checked by the participants before data analysis; (2) all data were coded, categorized and analyzed according to the Research Questions; (3) “within-case analysis” was employed to explore the relationships between the interview and observation data; (4) “cross-case analysis” was employed for comparing overall findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Profile of participants

| Case | School | Gender/Age | Years of teaching experience | Trained in music education | Training in music | Music class chosen for observation (Age group) |
|----------|--------|------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1. Amy | A | Female/40+ | >20 | No | - | Ages 8-11 |
| 2. Betty | A | Female/20+ | <5 | No | Piano | Ages 12-14 |
| 3. Carl | B | Male/30+ | >10 | Yes | Piano | Ages 8-11 |

Characteristics of sample schools & students

School A

- A school for children with SID
- Total number of students: 53
- Maximum number of students in a class: 5
- Students with multiple disabilities and chronic disease

School B

- A school for children with SID
- Total number of students: 79
- Maximum number of students in a class: 8
- Students with multiple disabilities

Findings: Perceptions about creativity

| Amy | Betty | Carl |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SSID are able to explore and create sounds with music instruments | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SSID's responses to music can be regarded as creativity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A musical environment can motivate SSID to create sounds and movement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating sounds is a way of entertainment for SSID | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Music creativity is a way for SSID to express their feelings | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Music creativity for SSID can be shown in their choices of sound |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SSID show their music creativity through (a) free play with adapted music instruments; (b) body movements while listening to music | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• SSID need to be connected with music before they can create music | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• sources/adapted music instruments and their ways of exploring/play with the sound sources |

Findings: Observed practices of creativity

| Amy | Betty | Carl |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow more time for free play with adapted music instruments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select interesting music to motivate SSID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use IT apps and software to create and explore sounds |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare more adapted music instruments for students to choose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt music instruments according to individual SSID's specific learning difficulties and disabilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use visual aids to stimulate/motivate SSID to participate in creative music making |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarize students with music a wide range of music | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play music repeatedly until SSID can connect with music | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review familiar music/songs with SSID to motivate them to participate in creative music making |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow SSID to use all parts of their body to play with the adapted music instruments or to create music movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow SSID to use all parts of their body to play with the adapted music instruments or to create music movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow SSID to choose their favorite sound sources/music instruments for creative music making |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow SSID to select their favorite adapted music instruments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use digital reading pen for SSID to listen to music on their own | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> View video recordings of SSID's music making with students, give verbal feedback, encourage self-assessment and peer-assessment, and create sounds/movt along with their videos |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow ample time for SSID to show their creative music responses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give verbal feedback to encourage SSID to create sounds or movement | |

Conclusions

- Teachers' perceptions of creativity are related to the abilities of SSID, and echo the views of Pope (2005) and Steers (2014) that regard creativity as a common human attribute and the capacity to make something valuable with respect to a person.
- Teachers' classroom practices demonstrated that they explored various strategies to engage SSID in creative music making (Cole, Mooney & Power, 2012), e.g. IT application (Loveless, 2003), formative assessment, including verbal feedback, peer assessment & self-assessment (Burnard & Power, 2014; Byrne et al., 2003)), allowing ample time for creative responses, value students' choices, and the provision of a musical environment with a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar repertoire.
- Teachers' classroom practices reflect their perceptions of creativity. However, their perceptions are more likely to be influenced by their professional experiences rather than their musical expertise as found by Odena and Welch (2012).

Implications for future research

- Future research may further explore effective classroom practices for developing creativity in music classrooms for students with all levels of intellectual disabilities in special schools settings and in inclusive mainstream schools settings

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