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Adapting the music curriculum for senior secondary students with intellectual disabilities in Hong Kong: Content, pedagogy and mindsets

By Dr. Marina Wai-yea Wong

Introduction

The power of music to influence general learning is well established (Hallam 2010).

However, encoding this within a music curriculum remains for many a mystery

(Rikard, Bambrick, and Gill 2012). For children with learning difficulties, music has

been shown to impact positively their tolerance, self-discipline and self-esteem

(McCavera 1991), their development of communication skills (Y. T. Leung and B. W.

Leung 2012), social skills (Rickson, 2012; Vega 2012) and cognitive processing

(Portowitz and Klein 2007). Encoding these benefits within a special education music

curriculum remains a challenging area for music educators (VanWeelden 2007) not

least because teachers generally lack an understanding of what it is like to be a student

with special needs (Colwell 2013). The absence of a shared perception of being a

student with special needs has led to reported marginalization (Jellison and Wolfe

1987), a narrow focus on music as a therapeutic medium (Patterson 2003) or

ill-defined collaboration of both music specialists and special educators (McCord and

Watts 2006). Most commonly music specialists undertake teaching of pupils with

special needs without support nor training in special education (O'Regan 2007),

creating a situation in which the content and pedagogy used in music lessons

inevitably vary from school to school.

This study aims to help broaden music teachers' understanding of the teaching and learning of music in special schools in Hong Kong, and so stimulates reflections on the process involved in adapting a music curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities. To meet these aims, this study first sets out a philosophical framework to the Hong Kong context and second, explores the content and pedagogy used in music lessons of three special schools in Hong Kong.

Philosophical Framework

Understanding the prevailing philosophy of an educational context frames how people think and so helps predict and explain their choices (Alperson 2011). Among the many different schools of thought in Chinese society, the Confucian school has been very influential in education for over 2000 years and thereby the mind-set of educated Chinese people. As in contemporary education, Confucius focused attention on 'core' subjects - for his time these comprised the "Six Arts" of music, archery, rites, chariot-driving, literature, and mathematics. Also like contemporary education, Confucius valued the concept of a common core curriculum; "there is a single teaching, meant equally for all classes of persons" (Confucius: 15.39) mediated by

perceived ability “with men of middle level or higher, one may discuss the highest; with men below the middle rank, one may not discuss the highest” (Confucius: 6.21). For Confucius, as now in Hong Kong, this ‘mediated open-access education’ in practice expects the teacher to adjust the curriculum to the students’ abilities – advanced knowledge to students who are above average, a simplified curriculum to those below the average. This teacher-mediated curriculum also carried expectations that theory be entwined with practice thereby producing the joy of learning “to study and at due times practice what one has studied, is this not a pleasure?” (Confucius: 1.1). From this teacher-mediated curriculum, student learning is equally framed by a set of expectations – for students ‘learning’ involves acquiring knowledge linked to skills, an acquisition gained by studying hard with a happy heart. This Confucian educational framework, in which both the teacher and learner have set expectations, has proved robust. It is however not without trials. As each successive generation of teachers, students and society seek to embrace Confucian expectations there are inevitable periods of adaptation and lapses in implementation.

In Hong Kong, where education is traditionally the ladder to upward social mobility, educational competition thrives producing, by necessity, winners and therefore losers. This creates a context where educational success or failure is deemed a personal marker. Accepting self-responsibility for this personal marker has led to an

incomplete perception of Chinese teaching-learning as being achievement-oriented with its logical corollary that the Chinese usually hold negative attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities (Scior et al. 2010), underestimating their wider capabilities and perceiving them as being severely impaired (Siperstein et al. 2011). Such perceptions are incomplete when they ignore educational reform in Hong Kong since 2000 that seeks to re-define education not as ‘winners/losers’ – as under the previous ‘subject-based’ system - but as ‘whole person development’ (EDB 2011a). In Hong Kong, the contemporary education system’s aims of ‘whole person development’ and ‘one curriculum framework for all’ (EDB 2013a) re-cast the role of Hong Kong’s teachers closer to the original Confucian ideal. Hong Kong teachers are now expected to help their students gain both ‘academic’ and ‘personal’ success as measured across a ‘common curriculum’. How this Confucian ideal of theory and skills plays itself out in contemporary Hong Kong and how this impacts on our understanding of ‘special education’, we now consider in the following.

Contextual background

From September 2008, all students in Hong Kong, including those with special educational needs, are eligible to receive 12 years of free education, i.e. six years of primary education and six years of secondary education (EDB 2013b). Eight types of

learning/behavioral difficulty are identified as engendering special educational needs - hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical disability, intellectual disability, speech and language impairment, specific learning difficulties, attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder and autistic spectrum disorders (EDB, 2008). The policy for special education in Hong Kong states “students with special educational needs are to receive education in ordinary schools as far as possible, or in special schools when necessary” (EDB 2012). Notably, this policy was introduced without additional teacher-training nor additional professional resources. Most commonly, students with intellectual disabilities are placed in special schools; however parental pressure has led some students with special educational needs to be integrated into mainstream schools (Lian, Tse, and Li 2007) where reportedly they experienced learning and social interaction difficulties within large class settings (Wong 2002). In the school year 2011-2012, there are 60 special schools enrolling almost 8,000 students (CSD, 2013). Of these 60 special schools, 1 is a hospital school, 2 are for children with visual impairment, 2 for children with hearing impairment, 7 for children with physical disability, 7 for social development, and 41 special schools for children with intellectual disability (EDB 2011b). Within this latter sub-group of 41 special schools, 14 are for children with moderate intellectual disability, 11 for children with mild intellectual disability, 10 are designed for children with severe/profound intellectual

disability, and 6 for children with mild or moderate intellectual disability (CHSC 2012).

According to the principle of “one curriculum framework for all”, the curriculum for students in special schools is based on the official school curriculum centrally set by the Curriculum Development Institute (EDB 2013a). This ‘one curriculum’ however is flexibly interpreted according to the students’ perceived abilities. Teachers of students with a mild level of intellectual disabilities usually follow the official curriculum as much as possible (Poon-McBrayer and Lian, 2002); teachers of students with moderate to severe/profound intellectual disabilities however focus on a functional curriculum related to their student’s daily life (Lian, Tse, and Li 2007) and may not have any music lessons at all. In Hong Kong, teachers are inducted into a view that education is largely highly competitive, a view that accordingly has low expectations of students labeled in need of ‘special education’. During teacher-training the pedagogy is primarily skill-based, such as focusing on practical skills of singing, instrumental playing and aural skills of music listening, rather than student-centred learning. When employed, teachers do enjoy a high degree of classroom autonomy but at the expense of in-service guidance, an induction process which can lead to a sense of professional isolation and pedagogic calcification (Li, Tse and Lian 2009; Chau and Forrester, 2010).

Music curriculum in Hong Kong special schools

Music is a subject of the Arts Education Key Learning Area. The *Music Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)*, (hereafter referred to as the *Guide*), (CDC 2003) and the *Music Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4 – 6)*, (hereafter referred to as the *C & A Guide*) (CDC and HKEAA 2007) lays out a curriculum framework for children from ages 6 to 14 (primary level and junior secondary level) and ages 15 to 17 (senior secondary level) respectively. These two curriculum documents consistently map the overall targets of the music curriculum, including “developing creativity and imagination”, “developing music skills and processes”, “cultivating critical responses in music” and “understanding music in context”, to be achieved through integrated music activities, i.e. performing, listening and composing activities (CDC, 2003: 12; CDC and HKEAA 2007: 6). According to the *Guide*, teachers of mainstream schools are expected to develop a school-based curriculum to cater for students’ abilities and interests. There is no specification subject content or mandatory requirement of music repertoire. However, the *C & A Guide* clearly lays out the scope of study of Western classical music and traditional Chinese music required for students who take music in the capstone examination of senior secondary level – the Hong Kong Diploma of Education. Teachers in special schools are

encouraged to develop their own adaptive study programme to cater for their students' abilities (EDB 2013a). However, although it is found that teachers attempting to do so experience difficulties (Chau and Forrester 2010; Li, Tse, and Lian 2009), there has until now, been no specific research into the content and pedagogy of adapted music curriculum in Hong Kong special schools.

Given the absence of specific research into how the content and underlying pedagogy of the set curriculum is adapted in Hong Kong special schools, this research aims to explore, in three case studies, Hong Kong special school music teachers addressing the difficulties of adaptive-curriculum implementation.

Methodology

A qualitative multiple-case study method was employed (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998) using classroom observation and interview data standardized against respectively a pre-set observation guide and interview questions conducted by this study's sole, non-participant researcher.

The lingua franca of all interviews, lessons and data analysis was Cantonese – the most commonly spoken Chinese dialect in Hong Kong and the medium of instruction in government funded special schools. Subsequent translation of data for international dissemination was made and cross verified by professional bi-lingual

translators.

All interviews were transcribed and checked by the participants before the interview data were organized for analysis. The data were then coded according to categories that accord with the objectives of this study: (1) curriculum emphasis in observed practices; and (2) reflections on the choice of curriculum content. Transcriptions of teachers' interviews and reflections, observation notes and students' work were then analyzed and coded to reveal key constructs, which were then organized into categories through a process of "constant comparison" (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2007). Data from each school was first analyzed separately followed by a cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2003). This analysis method allows for "within-case analysis" in which is explored the relationships between the individual-case interview and observation data, followed by a "cross-case analysis" that compared across the findings of all cases (Merriam 1998). Finally, relevant documentation - including the official curriculum guide, textbooks and school documents – was subject to triangulation (Stake 1995; Merriam 1998).

Case selection

Case selection adopted a purposeful criterion sampling to "study all cases that meet predetermined criterion of importance" and are "likely to be information rich" in

revealing “targets of opportunity for system improvement” (Patton 1987). The criteria for sample selection were:

- (1) The participant must be an in-service teacher who teaches music in a Hong Kong special school, regardless of their age and gender;
- (2) The participant allows the research to observe his/her teaching in at least one of the music classes that he/she regularly teaches during the period of research (AY 2009-2010). The choice of music class for observation is left to the participant for his/her convenience.

Among the 41 special schools for students with intellectual disabilities, only 28 special schools offer music as an elective subject for students at senior secondary level. After contacting these 28 special schools, three music teachers from three special schools volunteered to participate in this study.

Pseudonyms are used throughout the reporting process to maintain the anonymity of both of the participating schools and teachers.

Settings and participants

All three special schools are funded by the Hong Kong government. Students of these schools are recruited through referral by the Education Bureau based on the findings of psychological, social and educational assessments. These educational assessments

grade students as having either mild, moderate or severe/profound intellectual disabilities. Students are normally allocated to a special school within their residential neighborhood. School A and B are special schools for children with mild intellectual disability, while School C is a special school for children with mild and moderate intellectual disability.

During the period of data collection, although music lessons at Senior Secondary level were offered in all three schools as an elective subject, not many students selected music. Accordingly, each of these three schools offered music lessons to only one group of students. In School A, the group consisted of nine students with mild grade intellectual disabilities. There were three observed lessons. Each observed lesson lasted for 40 minutes. In School B, the group consisted of 15 students with mild grade intellectual disabilities. There were two observed lessons. Each observed lesson lasted for 2 hours. In School C, the group consisted of 11 students with mild grade intellectual disabilities and 3 students with moderate grade intellectual disabilities. There were two observed lessons. Each lesson lasted for 35 minutes. The apparent disparity of lesson-length (40 mins / 2 hours / 35 mins) masks that within each school's academic year, music had the same contact-learning hours – although how these hours were timetabled reflects the diversity across school management. In summary, School C provided the more challenging 'mixed' ability class and were

least observed.

Three music teachers participated in this study. Amy, Betty and Candy taught in School A, School B and School C respectively. All three participants were trained music teachers with many years of experience teaching music in special schools. Amy was a proficient violinist, she had been teaching in School A for 7 years. Betty was a proficient pianist, she had been teaching in School B for 25 years. Candy was a proficient pianist, she had been teaching in School C for 20 years. All of them were specialized in music teaching. Although they had studied some courses on special education, none of their courses related to music education for students with special education needs. Two participants had experience of 'special education' that significantly predated the current Hong Kong education reforms initiated in 2000 (EDB 2011a). Only Amy in School A had undergone training and grounded her teaching experience entirely within the new education initiatives.

Procedures

The period of data collection of this study took place in the academic year of September 2009 to June 2010. Individual interviews of each of the three teachers took place at the beginning of this period and solicited their views on their individually adapted music curriculums. The music lessons to be observed were determined by

each music teacher and therefore varied from school to school. Post class-observation individual interviews were then conducted to document individual teacher's reflections.

Findings

These teachers' views on adapting a standard music curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities along with their observed practices are presented in the following three cases. Cited quotations are extracted from the interview data collected from either the pre or post classroom observation interviews.

Case 1

Amy regards as essential that, for her students with mild intellectual disabilities, her adapted music curriculum should essentially focus on listening activities grounded in local popular music. She observes that her students are more attracted to local popular music than any other genres of music. She believes that by combining listening activities and local popular music, her students can identify simple music elements such as (1) beats in simple time; (2) varieties of tempo (fast, moderate and slow); (3) contrasting dynamics (loud and soft); (4) form (binary form and ternary form); and (5) tone colour of familiar instruments such as violin and piano. As Amy says:

It's good to have both Western classical music and Chinese traditional music. However, I think local popular music should be included because that's the music that my students encounter in their daily life. It's more attractive for them than any other types of music. My students like listening to music. They can recognize simple music elements through listening.

Amy spent a lot of her lesson time on singing activities. She guided her students to sing their favourite Cantonese popular songs. She asked them to create body movements to accompany their songs. Amy prepared rhythm cards to guide her students' creation of song-based rhythm patterns. Then she asked students to demonstrate their rhythm patterns to each other using percussion instruments. Her students enjoyed these interactive activities which involved moving and playing percussion instruments while singing popular songs.

I usually spend more time on teaching students to sing and play instruments. They can imitate the pitch and rhythm correctly, but cannot play with much expression. These (popular) songs were chosen by my students. They were eager to learn more about the song because they liked it. I asked them to create body movement because it can help them to notice the characteristics of the song. I used peer demonstration because they would be more attentive when watching their peer's demonstration. They could gain more confidence to do it after sharing their peer's success.

Amy spent a part of her lesson time on guiding her students to use *Audacity* (Audacity, 2013), a computer program, to rearrange the popular song. She asked her students to play the basic pulse of the new arrangement of the popular songs with percussion instruments such as drums, tambourine and triangle. Her students enjoyed

this activity very much.

I also teach them music composition. They can re-arrange existing melodies with computer software, but it's difficult for them to make up new melodies. They would be very motivated to learn whenever I use popular music as an example to demonstrate musical concepts or develop it into music arrangement activity.

Amy repeated her verbal instructions many times before and during every task.

In addition to verbal encouragement she also frequently used symbols - such as smiley faces, thumbs up and big hearts - to show her appreciation of her students' work.

My students need a lot of practice before they can perform properly, identify a musical theme or become familiar with a song. Using computers can minimize their difficulties in reading and notating music. It's easier for them to create or rearrange music with computer software. They can listen to the playback and make changes until they come up with a satisfactory sound effect. They also need a lot of verbal and visual encouragement to support their learning.

Case 2

Betty believes that her students with mild intellectual disabilities are capable of following the mainstream school music curriculum and primary-level music textbooks by adjusting the expected learning outcomes. She believes that her students can read music notation after many years of continuous training.

Some of my students are very smart in music. They should be given the opportunity to learn more at advanced level. I expect them to love music and continue to enjoy music in their daily lives. I can adapt the curriculum and adjust the learning outcomes according to my students' abilities. They are trained to

read solfeggio notation ever since they entered the school at the age of 6. They are also trained to play a solo instrument. They can perform correctly in solo performance or group performance, but it's difficult for them to play expressively.

Betty states that her students can recognize very simple music elements through listening activities. These music elements include (1) varieties of tempo (fast, moderate, slow); (2) contrasting dynamics (loud and soft); and (3) tone colour of familiar categories of instruments such as strings and winds, and familiar solo instruments such as violin and piano.

My students enjoy listening to music. They can only recognize very simple musical elements. It usually takes a very long time for my students to get familiar with an excerpt. They need to listen to it for many times before they can recognize it. They also need visual aids to associate musical terms with music expression. They don't understand Italian musical terms; they learn it in Chinese. ... They lack of attention. A lot of visual aids are needed to catch their attention and to remind them of the tasks.

In Betty's music lessons, she trained her students to sing 2-part songs repeatedly in solfeggio and with lyrics. She guided her students to notice the repeated sections of the song before describing the form of song as Ternary form. She asked the same question repeatedly until every student responded to her. In addition to employing peer assessment, by asking students to give "stars" to encourage their peers, Amy also asked every student to indicate how much they liked the song using provided smiley symbols.

My students are very forgetful. They need a lot of practice of the individual parts before they can sing in parts independently. They don't have a wide vocabulary to express their ideas; they use "stars" to express their preferences and feedback. They like getting immediate feedback; they like to get more "stars" from me and their peers. They need a lot of visual aids. The BIG song sheet (a 3 ft x 4 ft poster displaying enlarged melody and lyrics) is an important aid to help them follow the melody.

Betty guided her students to compose short rhythm patterns. Her students worked in groups of three or four. She toured around every group to repeat her instruction and to make sure that all groups were properly on task. Each group showed their work by beating the rhythm with a percussion instrument of their choice.

The design of teaching aids, e.g. the magnetic board and the magnetic notes are very important for teaching rhythm composition. They could mix and match the rhythm patterns that they like before showing it to me and their peers. Group work is a very effective activity to get my students fully occupied.

Case 3

Candy comments that her students, 11 with 'mild' and 3 with 'moderate' disabilities – appear slow and passive music learners. They are, however, receptive listeners, particularly to nursery tunes and Western classical music.

My students are too slow and passive to learn anything. They enjoy nursery tunes and famous themes from Western classical music; therefore I let them listen to it very often. I'm not familiar with Chinese traditional music; therefore I won't teach that in my music class.

Candy believes that her students can only comprehend very simple and straight

forward musical concepts.

My students can sing solfeggio with simplified number notation. They can describe dynamics and tempo of music in Cantonese. They can identify tone colour of familiar solo instruments. They like attending concerts; therefore the school sometimes gets some free tickets for them to attend concerts.

In Candy's music lessons, she played musical excerpts of Western classical music repeatedly and checked if her students could recognize these themes and the names of the composers by pointing to the relevant word and picture cards. Her students are trained to point to smiley symbols in order to show whether they enjoy the theme.

They need to listen to an excerpt for many times before they can tell me anything about the excerpt. Some may be too passive to give me any response. Some of them cannot communicate well with words. They need to use visual communication cards, such as smiley symbols to show whether they are happy or not. They can only express their opinions about the excerpts in terms of smiley or star symbols.

Although Candy said that her pupils could not learn to sing, in the lessons observed her pupils did manage to do so, following nursery tunes on an audio-visual Karaoke computer. She also guided her students to arrange the nursery tune by changing some notes and lyrics. Her students used rainbow bells to explore the sound of the new arrangement of the nursery tune. They selected color cards to show the note of the corresponding rainbow bell. Every student had a chance to arrange a new

tune in front of their peers. Candy asked her students to applaud after every student's performance of creating new tunes with rainbow bells. They seemed to enjoy making up new tune with the rainbow bells.

It's easier for them to think about making up a new melody with a song that they are familiar with. The rainbow bells are helpful aid for them because they could arrange the order of the bells, try the sounds, and select those sounds that they like. The color of the rainbow bells could be used as visual aids for them to notate and communicate their ideas about the sounds that they like.

Summary of findings

To summarize the above findings of all three cases, teachers' views on the music curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities, their observed curricular emphasis and pedagogy in practice are presented in Table 1.

Discussion

The discussion of findings will focus on the three columns in Table 1: "teachers' views on the music curriculum", "observed curricular emphasis" and "pedagogy in practice".

Teachers' views on music curriculum and observed curricular emphasis

Despite the commonality of their Chinese heritage, but reflecting the unique position of Hong Kong as a gateway to the world, all three teachers are proficient mainly in

knowledge of and performing skills in Western music traditions. This eclectic knowledge and skills base empowers diversity amongst each case study in terms of music-curriculum subject-focus and observed curricular emphasis.

Amy's diversity embraced contemporary local popular music, making use of various activities, e.g. singing popular music and playing percussion instruments to accompany popular music. Pupils also analyzed very obvious musical elements, such as beats, tempo, and form of popular music through listening activities. They also created body movements and rearranged excerpts of popular music with computer software. Notably Amy's diversity was partially 'student-centred' for she believed that her students are more interested in local popular music than any other music genres. This 'student-centred' approach may reflect both Amy's teacher-training being framed by the post 2000 education reforms and partially by her age, which here placed her closest to her pupils' contemporary interests.

Betty taught her students using music textbooks for primary schools. Instead of adapting the mainstream curriculum at senior secondary level, the *C & A Guide* (CDC and HKEAA 2007), she adapted the mainstream primary curriculum, the *Guide* (CDC 2003). Betty's stratagem here is a common practice for School B when teaching students with intellectual disabilities. This 'simplified curriculum' approach perhaps reflects Betty's deeply grounded, pre-2000 education reforms, teaching experience

which focuses on learning that is primarily, subject-centered. Although curriculum materials of music textbooks include both Chinese traditional music and Western classical music, commonly few examples are provided from Chinese music (Brand and Ho 1999). Betty did not mention that she prefers Western classical music repertoire, but this is reflected both in her choice of teaching repertoire and her views about the curriculum content which favoured traditional listening and performing activities and repeating/reinforcing the simple music elements that her students were familiar with. Such views are consistent with Hong Kong's long, historical influence by a British administration – views no longer current in contemporary Britain's musical 'special education' (TDA, 2009), but views which none the less strike a chord with Confucian values of teacher's duty and student's responsibilities.

Candy, the only teacher here who taught both 'mild' and moderate' students, admitted that she was not familiar with Chinese music repertoire because she studied only music of the Western tradition – reflecting her training 20 years previously which emphasized Western music instead of Chinese music (Brand and Ho 1999). She preferred teaching her students using nursery tunes and famous themes from Western classic music because she considered her students enjoyed these genres more. This view accords with Betty's (above) in that students with intellectual disabilities were readily viewed as being 'simple'. This interpretation is encouraged by Candy's stated

belief that her students could only comprehend very simple musical concepts and simplified notation. Accordingly, Candy limited the scope of both the repertoire and activities of her students to match her expectations of both the interests and abilities of her students. Like Betty, Candy's adapted curriculum could be expected to strike a chord with fellow Hong Kong professional educators, though perhaps a slightly discordant chord with Hong Kong's current youths.

Although there was a difference in teaching materials among the observed cases, the views of teachers on music curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities were consistent with their observed curricular emphasis – what they said was what they did. These teachers tended to select materials that could cater for their students' interests and to adjust their curriculum to suit their students' abilities – following the Confucian ethos of educating everyone with equal opportunity, but adjusting the difficulties and expectations to each student's perceived learning ability (Confucius, 15.39 & 6.21). A key element amongst these three case studies is that all reflect and indeed may seem bound by their initial training perspectives. Amy and Candy adopt different forms of 'student-centered' approach – Amy prefers selecting attractive repertoire to suit her students' interests and Candy tends to set very easy tasks to suit her students' abilities, while Betty adopt a more 'subject-centered' approach.

Pedagogy in practice

There were a lot of similarities in the pedagogical practices among the three cases. This may at first seem surprising given the disparity in time between Amy and then Betty and Candy's initial teacher-training, except that such pedagogical similarities perhaps mirrors the static uniformity of pedagogic-guidance offered in Hong Kong's teacher-training. This is despite many education reforms over the decades, including the most recent post 2000 changes. Five examples emerge from the research findings of this 'frozen' pedagogical practice. Firstly, these three teachers used a lot of repeated verbal and non-verbal instructions, such as repeating questions, repeated listening to music excerpts and repeated practice of singing with solfeggio and other performing activities. This method of applying repeated instruction reflects the Confucian teaching method of closely guiding students (Confucius, 1.1). Secondly, the use of multiple visual aids to hold students' attention, such as audio-visual clips, communication cards, and computer software, and reflects a prescriptive and simplistic use of psychology in which only the teacher's focus is acknowledged to be 'right'. Thirdly, the use of both verbal and visual encouragement - such as thumbs-up, smiley symbols, and stickers with hearts or stars. Sometimes these stickers were given as an award of music achievement and sometimes these stickers were given as an encouragement of participation. These all introduce a false validation to these students.

Fourthly, the encouragement of students to express themselves largely through smiley symbols again narrows students' expressions, limited to and by a 'simplified' code. Fifthly, although the use of peer support to help students learn promises a validation of peer communication, the implementation here is contrived and teacher-controlled. This is shown in Amy directing her student's demonstration, Betty defining peer assessment and Candy leading peer applause.

Such comments may seem harsh on these three teachers – for they point away from 'teacher-centered' to the other possibilities of a 'student-centered' pedagogy. Yet there is evidence that something is at odds in these same classrooms. In order to make these 'frozen' pedagogical practices work well, all three teachers exercised patience and had to give their pupils ample time to accomplish their set music learning tasks. This raises two interesting questions: are patience and time essential key elements in supporting students with intellectual disabilities or are the traditional pedagogies flawed such that here they only work with the addition of more patience and lesson time than may be found common in mainstream schools?

Limitations

Educational research suffers many limitations, as here when reporting the interface between policy and practice, data-based conclusions drawn from a small sample-size,

voluntary and limited classroom observations and a teacher-centred view-point.

Reporting in spite of such limitations serves both to clarify what can be gleaned and, hopefully inspire in what ways future research can improve on such gleanings.

Conclusion

Findings of this study display three Hong Kong special schools music teachers implementing their individually adapted music curriculums for senior secondary students with intellectual disabilities. Although the precise curriculum emphasis varies from school to school according to the choice and expertise of music teachers there remains binding similarities, both in the impact of their initial teacher-training and their shared, common pedagogical practices. Behind these common pedagogies – indeed supporting and facilitating them – lie two key common elements of patience and time. This apparent dependence on teacher patience and longer classroom time than in mainstream schools raises an interesting question-mark over the efficacy of these common pedagogical practices. Is the assumption that students with intellectual disabilities progress largely through being given patience and time justified? Or, is such an assumption in fact predictive that these pedagogies fail to meet these students' needs and teachers remain unaware of their students' learning experience?

The power of music to influence learning is a strong argument for retaining

music within schools. However, encoding this within a music curriculum has been shown for many to remain a mystery (Rikard, Bambrick, and Gill 2012). Similarly for students who are intellectually disadvantaged encoding these benefits within a special education music curriculum remains a challenging area for music educators (VanWeelden 2007). The causation of such challenges may be many, but not least perhaps is the commonality amongst teachers and teacher-trainers that we generally lack an understanding of what it is like to be a student required to learn through the veil of 'special needs' (Colwell 2013)?

Insert Table 1 here

Table 1. Teachers' views on music curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities (ID), their observed curricular emphasis and pedagogy

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