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How May I Help? Teaching Assistants' Support in Music Lessons for Children with Severe Intellectual Disability

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Abstract

Theoretical background

Teaching assistants' support is crucial to the learning of students with severe intellectual disability (SID) (Martin & Alborz, 2014). The collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants is one of the key factors influencing the support provided for students (Moran & Abbott, 2002). It implies that the way teaching assistants are involved in music lessons can affect the music learning of students with SID.

Aim

This qualitative study aims to explore the collaboration between music teachers and teaching assistants, and how such collaboration contributes to the music learning of students with SID. Both music teachers' and teaching assistants' perceptions were explored to understand their expectations and experiences in music lessons. Musical interactions between teaching assistants and students were also investigated to evaluate students' music learning under the support of teaching assistants.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach. The data were collected through interviews and class observations. Two classes of students with SID were selected based on the music teachers' experience and professional training in music education and special education. The two music teachers and their teaching assistants were interviewed after a series of music lessons. Three music lessons from each class were observed, and the lessons were video-recorded for analysis.

Results

Results suggest that teaching assistants expect music teachers to guide them to evaluate students' music learning, and develop their skills to entice students' musical responses. When music teachers' instructions are clear, teaching assistants display more spontaneous musical interactions with students. The teaching assistants are also more observant to students' musical behaviours. Teaching assistants who are expected to involve musically in class are more ready to facilitate students' music-making behaviours.

Conclusions and implications for music education

It is common for teachers in special schools to collaborate with teaching assistants in classrooms for children with SID in Hong Kong. However, the way music teachers collaborate with their teaching assistants can be diverse. Such diversity leads to differences in teaching assistants' involvement in music lessons and their musical interactions with students. It also affects teaching assistants' support provided to facilitate students' music learning.